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ABSTRACT

This is a collection of lectures by distinguished members of the English profession who were invited to lecture to schools located far from large urban and cultural centers. Includei are papers by: John H. Fisher, "Truth Versus Beauty: An Inquiry into the Function of Language and Literature in an Articulate Society"; Walter Loban, "The Green Pastures of English"; James N. Britton, "Writing to Learn and Learning to Write"; Owen Thomas, "Teaching Children about Language"; George E. Kent, "Selfconscious Writers and Black Folk and Cultural Tradition"; John Ashmead, "New Theories of Film and Their Significance for the Seventies"; and Miriam Goldstein Sargon, "Johnny is Neither Eager Nor Easy to Please." A brief biography of each of the seven lecturers is provided, as well as a list of dates and places where they spoke. (JF)

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NCTE 1972 DISTINGUISHED LECTURES

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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Foreword

In his foreword to *The Promise of English*, 1970, James E. Miller, Jr., then president of NCTE, referred to the underlying theme of that publication as the human dimension of English. His words bear repetition here: "At a time when all the modern world appears in a conspiracy to deprive man of his humanity, to reduce him to a single number in an endless row of figures, to drain him of feelings and emotions and commitments—at such a time it is imperative that we in English proclaim to the world the sheer, unsuppressible *human-ness* and *humane-ness* of the literary, linguistic, and writing experiences we encourage and seek."

Dr. Miller's worthy successor, Dr. Robert A. Bennett, in the foreword to the 1971 volume of distinguished lectures, *The Discovery of English*, commented on the undiscovered human resources of our profession, "the youth we serve, the young in our profession, and all racial and ethnic minority groups who are part of our society." As in previous years the NCTE has again invited selected distinguished members of our profession to lecture to schools and colleges which are far from large urban and cultural centers. These lectures are later collected in a publication so that all members may share in the wealth.

This year the human resources to be mined include those pointed to by John Ashmead who shows how "movies today continue to be a living art in contrast to modern poetry, drama, and other forms of literary crewel work." His language of film study has its own special codes: "cultural codes, specialized codes and referential codes."

James Britton claims that the NCTE may have been foolhardy in choosing him to participate. Would that we were always so foolhardy. He says more competently than anyone I know that reading and writing and talking are complementary processes. "I want to start by saying the most fundamental and universal kind of learning for *human beings* is learning from experience which means bringing our past to bear upon our present. To do this we need to interpret, to shape, to represent experience. One way of representing, interpreting, and shaping experience is by talking about it."

Although the articulate John H. Fisher uses "Truth *versus* Beauty" as his title, his lecture contains beautiful nuggets of truth

about the function of language and literature in an articulate society. Like Mr. Britton, he sees the task of the English class as that of "language development not in terms of skill or correctness but in terms of personal growth."

George Kent's treatment of selfconscious writers leads, he says, to the fact that the rhythms and vitality of the black folk and cultural tradition provide a deeper sense of black life and literature. "They enable us to get beyond the flat confines of sociological description, to move into a blackness much deeper than sloganeering or rhetoric, to gather some of the vitality, density, and complexity that have characterized black life in America."

Like Dr. Kent, Walter Loban uses the expression, "green pastures" but whereas Kent's is a direct reference to the play, Dr. Loban uses it as a metaphor—"Whole wagon trains of pioneer teachers, researchers, and thinkers are penetrating the continent of language, mapping its mountain ranges and rivers, discovering and opening new territories . . . and claiming fertile valleys."

Today's teachers may be pioneering in 747's rather than wagon trains, but they still face dangers and challenges, as pointed out by Miriam Goldstein Sargon. They are confronted by a new breed of students, neither easy nor eager to please, and by new modes of learning for which they have no training. They face a proliferation of new elective courses which threaten the unity of English, and "linguistic ferment" in which they are engulfed by new knowledge about language and how it is learned.

We are grateful that Owen Thomas's curiosity about "what goes on in the minds of an author and a sensitive reader" led him to his study of language. The following quotation from his lecture seems a fitting conclusion to introductory remarks about the humanness—the humanity—of English. "Controlling the power of the atom is, as I've said, awesome; but losing the ability to communicate is more than awesome—it's literally annihilating. If we should lose this ability, then we would have a hostile, constantly threatening world of men who make, as a Russian poet has said, 'funny animal sounds.' In such a world, we would no longer be human."

Oakland Public Schools
June 1972

Virginia M. Reid
President, NCTE

Contents

FOREWORD
Virginia M. Reid
vii

TRUTH VERSUS BEAUTY: AN INQUIRY INTO THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN AN ARTICULATE SOCIETY
John H. Fisher
1

THE GREEN PASTURES OF ENGLISH
Walter Loban
17

WRITING TO LEARN AND LEARNING TO WRITE
James N. Britton
31

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT LANGUAGE
Owen Thomas
55

SELFCONSCIOUS WRITERS AND BLACK FOLK AND CULTURAL TRADITION
George E. Kent
71

NEW THEORIES OF FILM AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE SEVENTIES
John Ashmead
95

JOHNNY IS NEITHER EAGER NOR EASY TO PLEASE
Miriam Goldstein Sargon
115

Truth versus Beauty: An Inquiry into the Function of Language and Literature in an Articulate Society

John H. Fisher

JOHN H. FISHER, John C. Hodges Professor of English at the University of Tennessee, is best known to the English teaching profession for his leadership in the Modern Language Association, for which he was assistant secretary, 1949–51; treasurer, 1952–55; and executive secretary, 1963–71. He began his teaching career in 1942 at the University of Pennsylvania while completing his Ph.D. there, and went on to teach at New York University (1945–55), to which he returned (1962–72). In the intervening years, he taught at Duke University (1955–60) and at Indiana University (1960–62). He has also served as consultant to the U.S. Office of Education, member of the United States National Commission to UNESCO, and trustee of the National Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation. Dr. Fisher edited *PMLA* and initiated the *MLA Newsletter* and *MLA Abstracts*. He is the author of *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, coauthor of *The College Teaching of English*, and general editor of *The Medieval Literature of Western Europe: A Review of Research*. His writings also include articles for journals in the field of English. During his career, Dr. Fisher has been awarded honorary degrees by Loyola University of Chicago and Middlebury College.

As we begin to think about the function of language and literature in a society where the overwhelming majority of the population have had twelve years of education and are knit together by the most extensive network of television, radio, and journalistic media the world has ever known, it might be well to remind ourselves of current views regarding the place of language and the arts in society.

Is their function to communicate truth or to express beauty? Is language the practical, necessary tool for business, and literature merely a time-filling entertainment? To answer this we must consider the status of play in our culture. For more than half a millenium, inner-directed Western culture has more and more narrowly constricted the role of all non-productive play and emphasized the role of productive labor. Unlike many other cultures that spend only a small fraction of their waking hours in activity specifically designated as work, northern Europeans by the time of the Industrial Revolution—like the Japanese today—spent nearly all their waking hours in the fields or factories or shops or offices. Along with this elevation of the work ethic went a depreciation of play as the devil's work for idle hands, an indulgence, a form of moral laxity.

According to this philosophy, the only justification for language is as rational, useful communication, and the only justification for literature and the other arts is didactic. Mistrust of art and literature as entertainment was erected upon the ascetic inheritance of the Middle Ages, when from St. Augustine to Boccaccio poetry was branded as "attractive lying" and had to be given a moral interpretation to make it acceptable, and music, painting, and sculpture had to be bent to the service of the church to justify their existence. As the role of established religion grew weaker in the "enlightenment" of the eighteenth century, art and literature took on a cultural value of their own. Refinement came to replace saintliness as the requirement for leadership. After the Middle Ages in European society—and from the beginning in American society—power and prestige passed out of the hands of a class of hereditary rulers

to a group of self-made managers. As it had been since ancient times, eloquence and good taste were recognized as emblems of this new managerial class. But unlike earlier times, these qualities were now regarded largely as frosting on the cake. Hereditary rulers had not had to work hard either to secure or to hold their positions. Liberal education in the arts, like the long fingernails and tiny bound feet of the Chinese mandarins, the unsubstantial, elaborate clothing of the Renaissance courtiers, or the other marks of not having to work for a living that distinguish a hereditary aristocracy, had been one of the ways that rich men symbolized their freedom from labor. That is what the term "liberal" meant originally—the education of a man free from the need to work for a living. In contrast, the self-made manager must work very hard to earn his place, and then he must work very hard to maintain it. His intelligence and his labor are what count. His real business is production and managing the wealth of his nation. So the arts mean something very different to him from what they meant even to Shelley and Keats, who still represented the aristocratic tradition.

This practical view of life has paid off handsomely in technological development and in raising our standard of living, but it now begins to appear that our material progress has been made at considerable expense to the emotional well-being of our society. We have learned by the last third of the twentieth century what the philosophers have said all along, that longer lives and greater creature comforts do not necessarily bring with them greater human satisfactions. Indeed, the unequal distribution of our material goods and the frustrations growing out of this unequal distribution almost immediately begin to overshadow the new material advantages—so easily do we come to take for granted benefits like electricity and airplanes that would have been undreamed of luxuries for our great-grandparents.

Students of human behavior are now beginning to suggest that one reason for our discontent may be that Western society has forgotten how to play, or has so severely restricted its ideal of play that it has lost the power to conceptualize itself—that is, to celebrate its rituals of life and death and achieve that sense of group solidarity which alone makes existence endurable. In her chapters in *Philosophy in a New Key* on "Life-Symbols: the Roots of

11 5

Sacrament" and "Life-Symbols: the Roots of Myth," Susanne Langer discusses how a child instinctively strives first to conceive merely the experience of being alive.[1] This human power of conception—of having "ideas"—is the most exciting and joy-giving he ever experiences. The ritual symbols by which the central conceptions of life are made stable she calls sacraments, and—when they take the form of language—myths. The content of both sacraments and myths is usually homely, familiar actions such as eating, drinking, washing, giving birth, dying, killing, copulating.

It is evidently through play that these conceptions of living and dying are first experienced. Animals spend hours in play—the higher their mental and social development, the more they play. At play they learn not only the physical skills necessary for survival but the social behavior necessary for acculturation into their group. Experiments have shown that monkeys raised for the first six months in total social isolation do not suffer intellectually. They can solve problems as rapidly as their group-reared counterparts. But they never achieve the patterns of social grooming, social give and take, sex, and other social behavior that would make them part of the group. It is only through practice in play that such patterns develop. Children likewise first conceptualize their world through games. As they play "house" or "tea-party" or "school" they objectify and begin to live the patterns of their culture. "Dress-ups" may be the most important game that children play because it reveals the dramatic aspects of personality, the fact that one can be a different person in different situations.

Otto Jespersen long ago insisted that language developed from this play-ritual context, and not from the practical, rational need to communicate. "Men sang their feeling," he says, "long before they were able to speak out their thoughts."[2] In *Language and Myth* Ernst Cassirer says, "Myth, language and art begin as a concrete, undivided unity, which is only gradually resolved into a triad of independent modes of spiritual creativity." And, even more significantly, he suggests that myth and language are spiritual functions "which do not take their departure from a world of given objects, divided according to fixed and finished 'attributes,' but [they] actually first produce this organization of reality and make the positing of attributes possible."[3]

If these views have any validity, far from being the frosting

on the cake, all forms of play, and especially art and the creative use of language are essential to the development of the human psyche. If they are not formally incorporated into the value system of a culture, the need for ritual play may break out in such disturbing guises as the drug culture, the rock culture, or war, riot, and rebellion engaged in simply to break the monotony of the nine-to-five work-day and fifty-week year.

Language and literature lie near the heart of our social problem, and now—in deference to Jespersen, Cassirer, Langer and the others—let's get them in the right order, for literature precedes language. Literature is the foundation upon which language is built and not the other way around. This is the most significant perception of the last twenty years for the educational curriculum because it completely turns upside down the logical, rational approach to language learning of the traditional grammar books and the "Dick and Jane" series of elementary school readers, and puts in their place the symbolic, associative devices of "Sesame Street" and the "creative" approach of the British "open schools" which see language development not in terms of skill or correctness but in terms of personal growth. The task of the English class is to help the student to *conceptualize*, to help him use language to extend, reshape, and bring into new relationships the experiences in the world about him. John Dixon in his fine little book, *Growth through English*, in which he reports the discussions of this view of language learning at the Dartmouth Conference sponsored by the MLA and NCTE in 1966, sums the matter up with some lines from T. S. Eliot's "East Coker":

> . . . having had twenty years. . . .
> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate.[4]

The problem of shifting our view of the function of literature and language from the class- and communication-conditioned point of view to the personal and creative point of view is monumental—

and the more difficult, the more articulate and sophisticated our culture becomes. Because we are really asking to change human nature. Since the dawn of history language has been the chief instrument in society for distinguishing friend from foe. To speak one language or one dialect of a language rather than another is a ritual act; it is a statement about one's personal status. To speak the same language as one's neighbors expresses solidarity with those neighbors; to speak a different language or dialect expresses social distance or even hostility. One of our earliest accounts is in the Bible, in the Book of Judges (12:4–6). Sometime about 500 B.C. after a battle, the victorious Gileadites threw up a roadblock at the ford of Shibboleth which the vanquished Ephraimites had to cross to get home. As each person came to the ford, he was asked its name. The Ephraimites, who pronounced it "sibboleth" (as people in the Mississippi Delta region today say "srimp" instead of "shrimp"), were thus linguistically identified and systematically slaughtered.

And this, in one way or another, is what society has always done to the verbally different. Whenever a society has maintained its stability long enough to develop a rich group and a poor group or a successful group and a less successful group, one principal demarcation between the groups has been linguistic. So mandarin Chinese against the dialects; so classical Latin against the vulgar dialects that became the Romance languages; so the Oxford English of Henry Higgins in Shaw's *Pygmalion* against the cockney of the flower girl Eliza Doolittle. And in spite of the traditional descriptions of the uniformity of American English, we are no different. One handicap President Johnson could never overcome in his dealings with the northeastern establishment was his Texas hill country accent which those bankers and lawyers and professors associated with the "disadvantaged." A principal weapon in the Kennedy arsenal was the overlay of Harvard upon his Boston Irish brogue.

To this universal use of language as a cement that holds a society together while at the same time it sets apart the privileged in the society from the less privileged, the United States has added its own particular anxiety. Never in the history of the world has so large a body of foreign language speakers been absorbed into a society as between 1820 and 1930 in the United States of America. During that century, over 40 million foreign language speakers were

welcomed to these shores and it became the principal business of our schools to make them part of our culture. The English language and English literature, which carries with it the political, social, religious, and other cultural ideals of the inhabitants of the original thirteen colonies, were the principal instruments in this acculturation. A monolithic ideal of correctness in the use of the language, and a monolithic canon of the classics of English literature, and a monolithic interpretation of the values of this literature had to be created in order to accomplish the monumental task of acculturation. How could it have been otherwise? With the millions to introduce to elementary competence in the use of language and to the essentials of WASP values, who had time to weigh the historical or aesthetic values of the Southern dialect against General American, or the virtues of anti-establishment literature against the great tradition of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson?

But even as these historical developments in the nineteenth century caused the American linguistic and literary tradition to congeal, the process was accompanied by distrust of the prestige dialect and of the genteel literature of the school tradition just as universal in its own way as the development of the social distinctions in language and literature in the first place. Children learn as part of their initial mastery of language that there is no necessary connection between the sounds they make and the meanings these sounds represent. Man has been characterized as the talking animal. He can with equal accuracy be characterized as the only animal that lies.

This characteristic of language has led to a deep and abiding human distrust of glibness. The pejoration of the term "sophist" is an early example. You may recall that the Sophists were the respected composition teachers of Periclean Athens, the masters of oratory and rhetoric whose task it was to prepare the sons of the wealthy for leadership in the state. Their motives and methods were attacked by Plato and Aristotle on nearly the same grounds that ours have been attacked by the radical members of our society today, and "sophistry" has subsequently come to mean willingness to employ false logic and fallacious arguments in order to deceive. In earlier days, plain folk in this country distrusted anyone who talked like a Philadelphia lawyer. Noah Webster attributed the even accentuation of American English to our democratic social organiza-

tion, in contrast to the sharper British intonation which he associated with a master speaking to his servant. The distrust of the articulate egghead led in this century to our discarding the very term "rhetoric." Until the 1930s composition courses in college were still called "rhetoric" and their textbooks "rhetorics" in memory of the Latin tradition of the eighteenth century. Then they came to be called "communications" or "language arts" or simply "composition"—all of which project a more neutral, utilitarian image.

The disappearance of the term rhetoric was accompanied by the disappearance of other aspects of the genteel tradition in language and literature. In his book on *American English*, Albert Marckwardt has a chapter on the American proclivity for euphemism and linguistic inflation, as when the *bar* or *public house* became the *saloon* (from French *salon*); all post-secondary institutions became *colleges*, even *business colleges* and *barber colleges*; *supper* became *dinner*; *toilets* became *restrooms*; *janitors*, *custodians*; and *undertakers*, *morticians*. The reaction against this tendency to avoid naming—and thereby admitting the existence of—the unpleasant things in life has been the "dirty words" campaign.[5] But as an article in the *New York Times* observes, this campaign has another dimension:

> The use of obscene language among women, from the co-eds of the New Left to the proper matrons at swank Manhattan cocktail parties, has risen sharply, according to some leading psychologists.
>
> A generation ago, H. L. Mencken noted in *The American Language* that 40 percent of the co-eds at a small Southern college deplored the use of the word "bull," and 20 percent were shocked to hear "leg," which was thought to be an over-physical term for the portion of the anatomy known more properly as "limb."
>
> Now, the police at Berkeley, Calif., and Chicago report they have been amazed by the obscenity issuing from the lips of apparently demure girls at political demonstrations. . . . Dr. Zimbardo, who taught at Barnard in 1967 . . . said the women were aware that cursing was a weapon, one of the few they had. They knew that police were largely drawn from the lower

> class, and that lower class women don't curse, at least before men.
>
> He said he believed that women at Columbia were consciously exploiting class differences to enrage policemen whom they viewed as oppressors.[6]

The disappearance of the genteel tradition in language is paralleled by its disappearance in literature. The Victorian novel, culminating in Henry James, is full of the most ghastly situations—rape, incest, deviations of every sort, but all developed obliquely in language that could offend no one. It remained for the post World War I generation to break the taboo: probably beginning with Joyce's *Ulysses* of 1922, then Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929, Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in 1931, the unexpurgated version of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1932; Caldwell's *God's Little Acre* in 1933, and the others who paved the way for James Jones, Norman Mailer, Mickey Spillane, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and the others who finished tearing the veil of gentility from the novel and the stage.

I take it that the movement towards frankness in language and in the exploration of human experience is evidence of a rejection of hypocrisy that we can all share. It seemed ten years ago that English teaching could move along with this change in social attitudes and capitalize on it, helping steer students away from hyper-urbanism and pseudo-Culture (with a capital C) to more genuine and independent self-expression.

But we did not reckon upon the unconscious—upon those pervasive cultural forces in a consumer society that were to bring into question even the frankest and most self-critical modern literature. Hayakawa, twenty years ago, before he turned his energies in other directions, discerned the problem when he tried to turn our attention to *general semantics*. As sensationalism becomes a commodity for sale, it is obviously liable to the same sort of manipulation for economic and social gain that it had earlier accused the genteel tradition of being. Eventually we get hoaxes like *Naked Came the Stranger* and *The Sensuous Woman* which are as obviously contrived as anything by Longfellow or William Dean Howells—and no more to be trusted, no matter how "popular" they may become.

And the language and technique of advertising have so played upon our credibility that by now the "put-on"—the ad which kids its own language and its own pretensions—has become the current fashion.

But even beyond this obvious linguistic consumerism, we have been told by Marshall McLuhan that the very act of learning to read and write helps lead to the regimentation and benumbing of society. And in the introduction to a recent freshman anthology:

> that many teachers and students find the dominant values of our culture irreconcilable with their personal lives and political convictions. Some of these values are social hierarchy, the sanctity of private property, strongly differentiated sex roles, absolute morality, undiscriminating respect for law, the wisdom of resignation to society as it is. They are conveyed in many ways, both overt and implicit in the structure of our political and educational institutions, in advertising, in family life and social relations, in the presentation of news by television, radio, and newspapers. So pervasive are these values that they may be said to constitute an official culture: and in general they are supported also by the European-American literary and critical tradition which we tend to accept as *the* tradition. To teach composition has usually meant, therefore, to teach essays that exemplify official values while they illustrate the art of writing.[7]

If our increasing awareness of the psychological impact of the self-conscious use of language and literature begins to create a credibility gap, what are we to think of that ultimate in mass communication, television? From it we learn that in addition to distrusting what we hear and what we read, we can no longer believe what we see. The tragedy of Charles Van Doren and "The Sixty-Four Thousand Dollar Question," which some of you, I trust, will remember, was that we all thought we were seeing a sincere young teacher in a genuine quiz show and it all turned out to be a hoax. He had been shown the questions ahead of time. Repeated indictments by the FCC lead us to distrust anything we see in a television commercial.

By this time we know all too well that the small eye of television, by what it chooses to focus on, can make or break a Vietnam foray or a student demonstration. How many "takes" does it require to produce the brilliance of the David Frost Show? How honest a reportorial job was "The Selling of the Pentagon"? We are left with gnawing doubts.

Indeed, just as the psychologists and philosophers are beginning to emphasize the value of the creative aspects of language, the term "creative" itself appears to be undergoing the same pejoration as "sophist" and "rhetoric." When one describes a news reporter or copy writer as "creative," it is not his integrity that is being praised. It is his imagination, his wit, his inventiveness—and the credibility gap between his creativity and his reliability has already set in.

So the more articulate our society becomes, the more sophisticated we become in using and interpreting language, literature, and all other forms of communication, the more concerned we become about the integrity of the expression. There are two or three possible reactions to the perils of articulateness as there are to the perils of science and industry. The instinctive reaction is withdrawal—the desire to return to a simpler, more basic existence. In education, this takes the form of anti-intellectualism. The country is suffering from a mild form of this reaction just now, brought on by unrealistic expectations about the instant value of mass higher education. Education will not make silk purses out of sows' ears. That is hard language, but humble proverbs sometimes speak true. I hope, and I think, that Americans will continue to support their educational system, but they are not going to support it as lavishly as we thought in 1968, simply because they are coming to realize its limitations. Other custodial institutions must be created for many of the young people between the ages of 18 and 22—they cannot all be dumped on the colleges.

A second reaction to the frustrations of modern society is totalitarian control. With regard to the perils of articulateness, this takes the form of censorship. The media, creative writers, and educators are closely controlled as to their utterance. We used to think that in Fascist Germany and Communist Russia this produced intellectual dishonesty that we avoided in the freer West. But among the other casualties of the Vietnam war is our view of the integrity of our own mass media and public officials. We have a gnawing

fear now that the government controlled press may not be much worse than a press controlled by special political and economic interests. In particular, television has really made the whole issue of a *free* press meaningless. The expense and complexity of establishing a television network requires that it be centralized, so the real issue is only *who* controls it—the government, as in France; a semi-autonomous corporation, as in Britain; or business, as in the United States.

But a third response to the perils of an articulate society is to bring them out in the open and discuss them as we have been doing today. My growing conviction is that English departments have a grave responsibility to become centers for the discussion of integrity in speaking and writing, of censorship both overt and covert, of control of the media, of the psychological impact of the arts, of propaganda on every level from toothpaste ads to political campaigns, and of every other aspect of the way in which language knits together or divides our society. These seem to me more pressing problems for English departments than biographical and critical interpretation of poems and plays. And I think that it is our reluctance to address ourselves to these pressing problems that has led to the disenchantment of our colleagues in other departments and of the public at large with the humanities in general and with English departments in particular.

Yet to be limited to this perception of the purpose of studying language and literature is to be trapped by the mechanistic view of language merely as a tool for social intercommunication and to lose sight of it as a creative symbolic process. For, to return to the point at which our discussion began, Susanne Langer believes that the need to symbolize experience is as basic a drive in the human being as the need for food or sex. She finds the first evidence of a child's emerging self-consciousness in the personifications and fantasies he makes of the objects and actions about him. These story images in the child's mind merge and alternate with his actual sense impressions so that he lives in a dreamlike, shifting, fairy world peopled by giants on the front lawn, talking animals, frightening furniture, and comforting stuffed toys. Far from being evil or pointless, these fantasies are figures of thought. They objectify the fears and desires that torment the child's budding mind. As he grows older, he passes from his own private mythology to the mythology of his society.

Religious stories introduce him to the awful concepts of birth and death which must inevitably haunt his entire life. Before school and in school, fairy tales and national legends develop his sense of values and of identity with those about him. Stories of the ugly duckling, the little Dutch boy who saved Holland by holding his finger in the dike, George Washington and the cherry tree, Paul Revere, Abraham Lincoln, and Teddy Roosevelt are likewise figures of thought which introduce the child to concepts of patience, honesty, love, and courage. These concepts are essential to his adjustment to life and to his development as a human being. But of more immediate relevance to the creative function of language, speaking and reading and writing poems and stories and plays helps the child to achieve two specific objectives.

First, it helps to make him aware of metaphor as a principle of human thought. For an animal, responding on the level of conditioned reflex, the bell for dinner *is* dinner: the sight of a man with a gun *is* terror. The child can learn that the story of Washington and the cherry tree may not be true historically, but that it stands for a profound human truth, the virtue of honesty. Fairy tale, myth, and legend can be perfect media for introducing children—and indeed older people—to the symbolic character of thought and language. If we can learn to take fairies and Greek gods as symbols for natural forces and human desires, perhaps we will be better able to cope with the myths of the beautiful people on television and the personifications of our desires and prejudices in the advertisements.

Becoming aware of language as symbolic is the first advantage of becoming acquainted with literature. The second is that the stories and poems of our culture are our treasury of concepts. I run into this almost daily in my teaching. You have no idea how difficult it is to teach *Paradise Lost* to students who have not read Genesis, or Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and *Ulysses* to students who know no Arthurian stories nor anything about the Troy story. *Moby Dick* requires a considerable knowledge of the Bible, and especially an understanding of the metaphoric meaning of Jonah and the Whale. Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and the other great poets of our time are completely out of the reach of people who do not appreciate classical and medieval allusions. And these allusions are not merely whims and affectations. They are figures of thought and thresholds to understanding.

We are concerned about the alienation of our young people, their rejection of the secure and settled ways of our society. A genuine understanding of the figure of Ulysses through the ages—in Homer, in Dante, in Tennyson, in James Joyce—will do more to make us and them aware of the agonizing debate in the human spirit between security and achievement than all of David Riesman's excellent sociological discussions in *The Lonely Crowd* and *Individualism Reconsidered*. For the lonely figure of Ulysses, adrift upon the ocean of existence, trying to find his way home, undergoing strange adventures with terrible giants and seductive nymphs—Ulysses is a figure of thought. The mere mention of his name evokes an awareness of the whole human dilemma. This is the true magic of language—the magic which alone gives humanity to mankind.

I must conclude, then, by denying that it is possible to choose between truth and beauty, any more than between work and play, in our study of language and literature. But the one conclusion I can reach is that the business of English courses and of all our reading and writing throughout life is less the conveying of objective information than it is self-realization. We must constantly be on guard against the natural human tendency to grade people in society by the language they use and the books they read. We must be aware of the hypocrisy this grading produces. People with the most perfect command of language and the best taste in literature and the arts did some of the most dreadful things the world has ever known in the 1930s, and we have not done much better ourselves in Vietnam in the last ten years. Intellectual and aesthetic sophistication cannot take the place of morality and human decency.

Yet, while the healthy suspicion of glibness and the pseudo-arts has more than a little in human history to support it, we still realize that language and the arts are the distinguishing marks of humanity. Like fire, and perhaps soon like atomic reaction, we cannot get along without them in spite of their manifest perils. We cannot suppress them or deny them without distorting our very nature. Language and literature must be *both* practical and imaginative. Society cannot exist without communication, and the more complex it becomes the more vital becomes the clarity and integrity of its communication. But without an ability imaginatively to conceptualize the world around us and our relations with one another, we

22

would have nothing to communicate—indeed, we would not even recognize ourselves as human beings. Literature is the storehouse of these concepts, and it is the richness and variety of the concepts that justifies our studying literature, just as much as the accuracy and lucidity of its expression.

Language is a medium; literature is a form. Neither the form nor the medium is important in itself. Both are important only as they support human values, and—the eternal peril of an articulate society—both the medium and the form, both language and literature, are always as capable of being *mis*used, of *mis*leading, or *mis*informing, as they are of uttering the truth.

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The Green Pastures of English

Walter Loban

WALTER LOBAN, professor of education at the University of California, Berkeley, is well known for his studies of language development in children. He holds a master's degree from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. Before going to California, he taught in public schools in Minnesota and Illinois, at Northwestern University, and at the University of Minnesota. During World War II, he was cited for outstanding performance in the U. S. Navy and is now a lieutenant commander in the United States Naval Reserve. He has been a curriculum consultant for many school systems, and in summer, 1971, taught in Sweden at a school for curriculum specialists from emerging Asian and African nations. Dr. Loban has received the Award for Outstanding Achievement from the University of Minnesota, the Honorary Award for Leadership from the California Teachers of English, and the 1971 Distinguished Lectureship from Oregon State University. He has served NCTE as a member of the Secondary Section Committee and the Commission on the English Curriculum. In 1967, he received NCTE's David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English, principally for his longitudinal study of the language development of 300 children from kindergarten through high school. Among his published works are *Teaching Language and Literature* (with Margaret Ryan and James R. Squire), *Literature and Social Sensitivity*, and *The Language of Elementary School Children*.

Teaching language and literature, for many who do so, is a source of pleasure and enrichment. If there are disappointments and dangers, there are also magnificent rewards analogous to fragrant green pastures, sunshine, and musical brooks. Yet the paths to such pedagogical Edens are not easy to find and one can understand how it is that many teachers wander into ways leading to barren rocky places.

The paths one chooses make all the difference. A preoccupation with efficiency and the disciplined acquisition of knowledge can become sterile; the concept of English as a Coney Island Funland is equally disastrous. The most desirable route, reconciling order and vitality, is never easily achieved, for it is deeply involved in the teacher's view of what human beings are and how they learn.

Related to this pleasure in teaching English is a victory British and American teachers may claim: their stubborn resistance, during fifty years now, to the prevailing winds of a limited educational psychology. Unfortunately for education, many psychologists' ideas about pupils and their learning, during these years, traced back to a tradition of the child's mind as a blank tablet on which selected stimuli might arouse responses. Behaviorism, associationism, and that famous salivating dog Pavlov kept annoying with food and bells—these have all contributed to a bleak picture of learning and of the child, one John Locke himself would have rejected as fully as sensitive teachers have done.

This limited psychology of learning found an easy affinity and support from the increasing influence of twentieth century science. Science, properly understood and controlled, can be helpful to mankind, but uncontrolled scientific technology has resulted in a culture too heavily oriented toward industrial and military visions. Mechanistic psychologies prosper in a climate where the cults of power and efficiency prevail.

Because of this, the learner has often paid a heavy price: overemphasis upon skills, minimum essentials, drill, and standardized tests which may indeed have "psychometric elegance" but are also

like the inadequate actress noted for her splendid ability to run the gamut of emotions from A to B.* In English, standardized tests almost universally measure what is easy to measure rather than what is important to evaluate. The danger is that any curriculum rapidly shrinks to the boundaries of such narrow evaluation.

More recently the path to a barren, rocky soil has included programed learning with stultifying content, performance contracts by firms unfamiliar with education and its problems, behavioral objectives, and accountability. All these are dangerous in the hands of anyone who lacks educational vision, who tingles with excitement at a program for teaching punctuation but hasn't the slightest idea how to program anything as complicated as the child's organizing his *own* ideas, or creating in him enthusiasm for reading imaginative literature, or helping him to speak with force and fire and delight.†

No school of psychology is all evil or all virtuous. The continental Europeans who followed Leibnitz instead of Locke have had problems, too—cloudy, nebulous psychologies often as ridiculous as our brisk efficiency directed to its superficial ends. What is needed, the reconciliation of opposites, is beginning to take place. By synthesizing the European work of Piaget and others with the accumulation of careful American research into the mental and emotional growth of children, we are at last beginning to get a reliable and stable picture of child growth and development, and this includes language development. Whole wagon trains of pioneer teachers, researchers, and thinkers are penetrating the continent of language, mapping its mountain ranges and rivers, discovering and opening new territories, disappearing into deserts and claiming fertile valleys. It's an exhilarating time to be a teacher, especially one interested in language.

American educational psychology has tended too much to view

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* Comment attributed to Dorothy Parker.

† To be sure, we should note the useful aspects of these technical aids (for there is limited good in them). We do need to teach and evaluate more powerfully than ever in the past; skills are important and need to be learned—but not as ends in themselves. The problem is to defuse these new gadgets; we want to use them for genuine instruction and evaluation of the complex objectives required by language.

the child as an organism which will respond to stimuli, a white tablet on which experience will write. Piaget and others have added a corrective: typical of continental European psychologists, Piaget sees the child's mind as an *active agent* operating on the environment, though he does not deny the importance of environment. One of the reassuring omens, the hopeful vista of greener pastures, is the possibility of a rationale reconciling American and European views of the child and his development. Piaget offers difficult reading: he has emphasized the logical thinking of the child (the whole realm of emotional life and its intertwining relations with thinking remain), but he has contributed a convincing and solid base on which education can increasingly build with assurance.

The World of the Child

The pastures of English are greener, then, if we know more about the child's ways of learning. We need to remind ourselves, also, of how the child looks upon his world. With smaller children we find this difficult, for they are less skilfull with words and self-analysis than are adolescents. One way for adults to seek insights is to summon up remembrance of things past, to seek in memory the qualities of their own childhood. Most of us cannot remember much that happened earlier than age three, and many cannot go back even that far. Yet a little effort does produce some unusual and helpful insights, and many men and women the world over have recorded their childhood memories for us.

Earliest memories testify to the intensity of sensory experience: Mary Ellen Chase, a teacher writing about her New England childhood, says:

> I was five, but already, before that, I had known the drowsy scent of red peonies in a hot corner of the garden, the friendly smell of cool apples. Taste I knew, too—the puckery, restraining taste of forbidden chokeberries, the taste of sulphur and molasses, lingering and powdery long after it should have gone. And the yellow of a floor was to me never so yellow as a great ball of dandelions which my father had once made for me and which he rolled to and fro, hither and yon, across the clipped green grass . . .[1]

28

George Santayana, philosopher, equally at home in Spain and Boston writes:

> I remember the *sota de copas* or knave of cups in the Spanish cards, with which I was playing on the floor, when I got entangled in my little frock, which had a pattern of white and blue checks; and I can see the corner of the room, our *antesala*, where I was crawling, and the nurse who helped me up. I also remember sitting in my mother's lap, rather sleepy, and playing with a clasp that could run up and down the two strands of her long gold chain, made of flexible scales; she wore a large lace collar, and had on a silk gown which she called *el vestido de los seis colores*, because the black background was sprinkled with minute six-petalled flowers, each petal of a different color, white, green, yellow, brown, red, and blue . . . Yet I retain a memory that must have been much earlier, of quite another kind. One evening, before putting me to bed, my mother carried me to the window, sitting on her arm, and pulled back the *visillo* or lace curtain that hung close to the glass. Above the tower of the house opposite, one bright steady star was shining. My mother pointed it out to me, and said: *"Detras de ese lucero esta Pepin."* Pepin, her lamented first-born, was behind that star. At the time, this announcement neither surprised nor impressed me; but something about my mother's tone and manner must have fixed her words in my memory. She seldom spoke unnecessarily, and was never emotional; but here was some profound association with her past that, for a moment, had spread its aura about me . . . I remember also the crisp potato omelette, fried in oil, that I had for supper, and that I still pine for and seldom obtain; and the napkin, white on the black and red table cover, on which the feast was spread.[2]

Are these memories skewed because the testimony comes from sensitive literary people like Chase and Santayana? I think not.

Rather, all human beings start with excellent sensory equipment and response; all children except the sickly are vitally alive and aware; the human child is incredibly active in exploring his surroundings—physical, emotional, and cognitive; he even achieves the miracle of language without making explicit the rules of grammar. In his poetic language, Wordsworth expressed this idea of vitality: the child comes trailing clouds of glory, the shades of the prison house begin to close upon many a growing child, and all too often his joy of living fades into the light of common day as the slow stain of life triumphs.

From such accounts of early memories, from many such accounts, one begins to discover a picture of the child's world in which sensory experiences are unusually vivid, in which emotional life is much in the forefront although the emotions are often rapidly experienced rather than deeply held. This world is a sheltered valley in which grown-ups loom high like giants, in which children are interested in small people like the Borrowers, the Teenie-Weenies, elves, and leprechauns. Children also dwell in an expanding emotional and cognitive world; they like stories about children who are able to fare well on their own without the aid of adults. However, they need a long period of nurturing in order to develop curiosity and wonder, and sociologists point out that ghetto children, forced to fend for themselves too early, lose this sense of curiosity.

But when we put together all our best thinking, insight, and research about children, the most important wisdom we gain may very well be concerned with the child's persistence in ordering the chaos surrounding every human being. Why does the child create symbols? May it be that the human child must not, can not, be at the mercy of the incessant, bewildering multiplicity of forces impinging upon him? Like adults, he cannot tolerate the vast buzzing confusion of the external world, and he must cope with an equally puzzling inner world. He must screen and classify what he needs to know and respond to, and he must blank out what appears to be trivial, peripheral, unnecessary. So the child clarifies, surmounts, stabilizes his emotions and concepts, and his human way of doing this is through symbols. Words, of course, will be tremendously useful, but so also are gestures, mimicry, dramatization, games, fantasy and dreams. If ever education understands how crucial all of

30.

these are to learners, even to adults, the humanities of music, literature, myth, folklore, painting, sculpturing, dancing, and drama will ascend to their central position alongside logic, reason, and problem-solving. The cognitive and affective realms will be reconciled, will flow together like a swift and powerful river.

But not all children are fortunate. Not all children experience relationships with significant adults who appreciate them as developing human beings. Besides learning to generate symbols, children need to develop fully the powerful mental processes of imagining and judging. *Imagining* must not become a substitute for action, but it is through imagining that children discover direction, gain a vision beyond the moment. *Judgment* functions as a check upon the imagination; it, too, is a guide to living. The people around a child must value symbolizing, imagination, and judgment, encouraging and supporting the child when he uses these processes. Some parents and teachers do this instinctively. Many do not.

I realize that some wealthy homes are cold and some middle class homes stuffy or dull, but such disadvantages, harmful though they are, shrivel in comparison with real poverty passed on from generation to generation, "like mirror locked to mirror in an endless corridor of despair."[3] In some improverished homes where there is still the will to survive, the child's world can be one of growth even though the parents do sometimes (in desperation) drink, fight, lash out at noisy children. Vitality is still there; it will transmit itself to the children.

The homes of poverty to which I direct your attention are rather those characterized by discouragement, defeat, and apathy. A numb, drifting, goalless home devitalizes the child. It can happen to any family of any race; but it happens most frequently to those in minority groups or those in isolated poverty areas. Both social and geographical isolation cause problems. For all children, putting order and direction into experience through drama, fantasy, judgments and words is crucial, but it is especially so for those from backgrounds where the parents have abandoned the warmth of family cohesiveness. Here is where school and teachers begin their efforts. The child's first experience with school is crucial. He must find support and success there.

The Language of the Child

Whatever oral language the child brings to school must be accepted and used at the beginning of his formal education. It is said that typical Americans listen a book a day, speak a book a week, read a book a month, and write a book a year. This gives us some idea of the crucial position of oral language and the neglect of it in the typical school curriculum. If the small child is to speak, he must speak whatever language he knows.

Out of the discussion Vygotsky and Piaget have offered concerning what Piaget called "egocentric language" has come an awareness that this behavior so common among children—talking aloud to themselves but not really trying to communicate to anyone else—is the child's way of thinking thoughts too complicated to be handled internally. "To silence the child's tongue is to silence his thinking."[4] And, one might add: *to dull his feeling.* Even as adults we know how important it is to externalize our thinking when we are engaged in logical, problem-solving thought requiring coherent and orderly positioning of ideas. Some kind of written notation or talking aloud to someone is a tremendous aid; without such externalizing of logical thought, we find our minds wandering, our thoughts meandering along a loose set of associations which stray farther and farther from the topic. We adults daydream easily, we mull things over—and, to be sure, we also, in amazing ways, come up with hunches, insights, solutions. But we do not find it easy to control our mental processes for internal, logical problem-solving. If it is difficult to internalize coherent thoughts as an adult, think how much more difficult all internal thought must be for an immature child.

Implications for Teachers

More and more we come to see how important it is for teachers in kindergarten and first grade to accept and respect whatever way of speaking the child knows when he begins his education. He needs to feel he is making a successful start, that he has the teacher's approval and acceptance. If the teacher keeps trying to alter his language, the small child is puzzled, confused, ill-at-ease. Teachers are now finding it crucial to develop the child's thinking and expression

of his feelings in his own dialect or language. For many, development of standard English speech and writing will be the result of twelve or thirteen years of schooling, not an accomplishment of a single year. This means a language experience approach to reading, gradual awareness of the many ways English is spoken, the use of dramas, tapes, imitations, and a sustained program of oral English throughout the entire curriculum. To be sure, part of the curriculum will eventually include assistance in the acquisition of standard English, so the learner is not denied the option of choosing whether or not he will use it. Even with the offering of this option, powerful strategies of motivation must be included. No one will ever learn a second dialect or a second language unless he genuinely wishes to do so, and all the pedagogical efforts in the world will avail nothing unless that positive attitude is established. This is a matter of guidance, one to be handled by men and women of unusual charm, persuasiveness, and understanding of the sensitivities of the pupil and his parents.

What might teachers do to release a child from a restricted syntax, to encourage him to try the full range of language strategies? Certainly, rules and drills will not do; they are merely external mustard plasters. Language is an *internal* operation. The child must grapple with his own thoughts and feelings in situations where he must express something relatively complex (for him) to someone he truly wishes to convince or make understand. One of the best recent illustrations of this is a product of the Lower East Side schools of Manhattan. In *A Dream I Had at Night and Other Stories* are printed the stories about monsters, dreams, family lore, and class life which the upper grade children taped and worked into compositions as a basis of their own reading materials.[5] Not only did the language curriculum prosper; the children and the teachers found their classrooms taking on the qualities of a society, bringing pupils closer to one another and to their teachers. Another example of language stretching may be seen in the Hawaii English Project, where children in the early grades often sit with a large cardboard separating two pupils so that communication and directions must proceed entirely by language. This project also uses literature and creative dramatics in powerful combination.

There are many sound and powerful ways to teach language,

if a teacher wants to reach the green pastures. Inquiry education in science often provides for amplification of syntactical strategies in language. Literature is another resource for making available richer patterns of language to be internalized slowly and effectively through listening and through the child's own reading aloud. Another way to approach language study is to help children have fun with it. Children always find interesting the curious aspects of language such as the many words for unpleasant things that begin with the letters SN----, the language of animals and birds, the replacement of ordinary verbs with vivid verbs (instead of *the boys went down to the river to swim* one chooses *the boys streaked down to the river to swim*). They enjoy word stories, malapropisms, metaphor, and books like *The Phantom Tollbooth*.[6] Creative writing and informal dramatics of all kinds draw upon affective and cognitive realms to motivate the best kind of language learning, the kind that enables the child to put his own experience into learning, to internalize language growth. No variety of grammar—traditional, structural, or transformational generative—can ever substitute for or short-cut this central activity of processing personal experience into language.

Teachers can help pupils to compare, contrast, and categorize, putting similar concepts under headings and imposing structure on loose material. Teachers can also help pupils use analogy, the most powerful expression of relationships. Analogy is important to the language of science, literature, and religion. Even in everyday language it is present to such an extent that we are not consciously aware of it (e.g., the heart of the forest, to shadow a suspect, a fountain pen). Teachers can help pupils become more proficient in synthesis by showing them how things go together, guiding them through induction from particulars to generalizations. Teachers can help pupils become more proficient in analysis by showing them how to take ideas apart, guiding them in deduction from concepts to particulars. This linkage between thought and language needs to be established primarily in oral language situations, not solely in writing and reading.[7]

This emphasis on the relation between thought, feeling, and language suggests that it is a dangerous oversimplification to reduce power over language to such mechanics as pronunciation, spelling, or explicit knowledge of grammar. They are not the true basic fundamentals of language arts. We need to be concerned with good

habits not only in details but in the larger adaptations of language to its use in life. We need to be concerned with good organization of ideas, with coherent thinking, with feelings free from confusion. These are not easy to teach, but a perspective emphasizing errors rather than the more complete picture of power over language will never nurture growth in expressing thought and feeling. Conventional pronunciation, for instance, is important, but it is certainly not as important as having something to say and organizing it in terms of a purpose. We are not concerned with producing polished superficial speakers who can smoothly tell irrelevant jokes at toastmaster's clubs. The hope of improvement lies not in artificial rules but in genuine communication situations where pupils grapple with expressing their own experience or receive ideas they want to hear—from other pupils, the teacher, a TV presentation, or a tape.

Just as the language of a people grows and changes with experience, so too does that of an individual. All education, whether within the classroom or without, takes place by extending the experience of the learner; in each extension, language plays a significant role. In helping the young child acquire language power, teachers are aware of the necessity, first, of providing opportunities for him to enlarge his experience, and then of helping him find appropriate words *to clarify and organize thinking* about that experience. The same holds true whatever the age or degree of advancement of the learner; understanding comes from dealing not with words alone but rather with the concepts for which the words stand. Each extension of experience creates new language needs and forces the acquisition of new language power. The vocabulary and concepts of music differ from those of geography; those of the automobile mechanic from those of the television engineer. The child whose experiences represent a wide range is likely to have a greater facility with language because he has been forced to use it in widely varying situations.

On the lowest level of development is the unreflective individual who learns by rote, believes what he is told, and attempts to regulate his life by slogans and formulas; at the other extreme is the person who, possessing a richly developed language, is effective in thinking about his thinking, in judging his judgments, and evaluating his evaluations.

It is true that teachers who deal with anything so complex, so personal, as language and literature are swimmers in deep and dangerous waters. The green pastures cannot be reached easily nor are they accessible to the timid, to the security-seeking types of humanity. Language growth is a process, most of which transpires beneath the surface and will not show up on any drill-pad scores or standardized tests now constructed. No Tinker-Toy approach, no Mechanico-Erector-set approach will ever, piece by piece, put language power together; it is not mechanical; it is deeply intimate, unalterably and forever. The only teachers to reach the green pastures are the artist-dancers, those who know the exhilaration of danger, the necessity and joy of a dynamic equilibrium. They have pondered Dostoyevsky's *Grand Inquisitor,* and they know the dance of life from Mozart, Hiroshige, *The Rubaiyat* and *Don Quixote.* Because they are fully alive, they draw the schoolroom into that dance of life, fluid, resilient, rhythmic and ecstatic, controlled by arabesques of movement and rhythm, enormous vitality inextricably mingled with order.

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36

Writing to Learn and Learning to Write

James N. Britton

37

JAMES N. BRITTON, Goldsmiths' Professor of Education at the University of London, has concerned himself during his career with the development of free and expressive writing in children, and its relationship to oral language. The current chairman of the National Association for the Teaching of English (United Kingdom), he received an honors degree in English and an M.A. in education, with distinction, from the University of London. After teaching English in schools from 1930 to 1938 and serving five years in the Royal Air Force during World War II, he became education editor for John Murray, Publishers. From 1954 to 1970, Professor Britton was head of the English Department, University of London Institute of Education. He was chairman of the 1971 York International Conference on Teaching and Learning English, directed the British Schools Council Research Project into Development of Writing Ability in Children (ages 11–18), and was a founder-officer of the London Association for the Teaching of English. In the United States, he has been a frequent speaker at NCTE conferences. He is the author of *Language and Learning*, editor of *The Oxford Books of Verse for Juniors*, and a contributor to *Language, the Learner and the School* and *Explorations in Children's Writing* (NCTE, 1970).

My lecture derives from some work that I've been doing for the past six years as director of the British Schools Council Research Project into Development of Writing Ability in Children (ages 11–18). We're still working on the data of that, so I shan't be referring to it very much more. But we began by collecting writings in all subjects from children eleven to eighteen from about sixty-five schools. We had about 2000 children in all and we drew a sample of 500 children's work in English and other subjects. And what I want to discuss is the thinking that has arisen in connection with sorting and interpreting those papers. I shall be quoting one or two of them to you.

The first of these was written by an eleven-year-old called Jacqueline, for her science teacher. She writes on how to make oxygen and this is what Jacqueline says:

> It is quite easy to make oxygen if you have the right equipment necessary. You will need probably a test tube (a large one), a stand with some acid in it. You will also need a Bunston burner, of course you must not forget a (glass) tank too. A thin test tube should fix neatly in its place. When you have done that, fill the glass tank and put the curved end upwards. Put the (glass) tank on the table and fill with water. Very soon you will find that you have made oxygen and glad of it.

It's the "glad of it" that interests us here. I wonder where that came from. On the whole she is trying to tell you what she did, so if you are really keen to make oxygen, well, you know how she went about it and you can go about it. That is what she is trying to do, but that bit at the end seems to come from somewhere else, doesn't it? I can just imagine her mum saying, "Yes, I dropped in and had a chat and a cup of tea, and glad of it." It comes straight out of speech. It is a sort of spoken fragment. I wonder what her science teacher thought of it. Do

you think *he* would think he was glad of it, or that this was something she might well have left unsaid? I think from what I know of the situation that he was glad to know that Jacqueline was glad she'd made oxygen and wasn't simply going through the hoops for him. On the other hand, while I would welcome that expressive feature, that feature taken from speech, in that writing at that stage, I hope you would agree with me that in the long run, ultimately, if she's out to inform us and wants us to have the information necessary for making oxygen, that at least is inappropriate—is not required.

What about this? This is another piece from the research by a fifteen-year-old boy from a school just off the old Kent road, which is a dockland area of London—a tough school, a school in a rough area.

> School, ugh. Dad is up having a wash, Mum has gone to work, sister has got up, and me, I don't get up till I'm told to. If I had my way, I wouldn't get up. Still I get up, have a wash and go to school. On the way you see some funny people about these days. Take that old man who lives round the corner. He says that he cannot go out to get his pension [that's the old age pension, and he has to go to the labor office to get it] but when someone gets it for him, he is round the pub like a shot. Crafty old man. At any rate, to get back to walking to school. School, what a terrible word, whoever invented it should have been shot. I know parents say schooldays are the best days of your life but that was in those days. School was good because you started work when you were twelve so school was good. For the time you were there.

Obviously a good deal of that comes out of speech also—in fact, the whole area is fairly near to speech, isn't it? He says "cannot" instead of "can't." He got that from books, not from speech. But most of it comes pretty directly from speech. And it has other features which make it like speech. He rather assumes that we're in his context. He invites us to accept an assumption that we know the sort of thing he's talking about, so he says, "You see some funny people about these days."

"Take that old man who lives down the corner." Well, what old man? We've nothing leading up to him. He's come straight out of the boy's context and he's offering it to us to accept and assume the context, which is again like speech and which is again why I want to call it "expressive." The whole piece is expressive. This is not a case of expressive features in a piece which is out to do something else. This chap isn't trying to inform us, to tell us things he believes we want to know; he's simply sharing a slice of his experience with us, letting us into it, which is an expressive function. It's a way of being with him. It is also loosely structured. He moves to the old man, for example, and then back to school again. This loose structure is again typical of the expressive. The expressive is a term I take from the linguist, Edward Sapir. He is usually called the father of American linguistics, but I think he deserves to be called the father of modern linguistics. Sapir says that in all language, two strands are interwoven inextricably, one an expressive pattern and one a referential pattern. Referential means you're talking about what's in the world and you are using your reference to what's in the world for useful purposes. You are informing people, instructing people, persuading people, and so on.

But the expressive bit of it. How does language get that? Sapir gives us one answer. He says that it is expressive because "language is learned early and piecemeal, in constant association with the color and the requirements of actual contexts."[1] In other words, we pick it up as we go. "Early and piecemeal," and it never loses its ability to revive the actuality of these contexts with all their colors and all their requirements.

So I want to define expressive language as language close to the self; language that is not called upon to go very far away from the speaker. The prototype for linguists is the exclamation. You know, the noise you make when you drop the hammer on your toe. And if you are by yourself it's purely expressive. In other words, merely vents your feelings. If somebody else is there, then it is also a communication. It won't have any meaning unless a person can see the plight you're in and knows you, because we have different habits of exclamation; what might be a very mild exclamation for you might be a rather severe one

for me. You need to know the person and the situation in order to get the full meaning of that communication. Well that's also true, in general, of the expressive. You need to know the speaker and the context.

Expressive language is giving signals about the speaker as well as signals about his topic. And so it is delivered in the assumption that the hearer is interested in the speaker as well as in the topic. In fact if I had to tie myself to one thing about the expressive I'd say that that was the most characteristic. It relies on an interest in the speaker as well as in the topic. It's relaxed and loosely structured because it follows the contours of the speaker's preoccupations. I sometimes take my wife for a drive, and I drive and she talks. And that talk is highly expressive. It's about anything that comes into her head. Things she sees from the car, things she remembers suddenly, things that she's forgotten in the kitchen and so on. It's highly expressive talk, loosely structured, only really communication to me because I am also in the context, because I know her and what has been happening around her. If I want to argue with her—if she says something that I disagree with—or if she says something I am curious about and want some information about, then her language is likely to move away from the expressive, further away from the person speaking and a bit nearer to the actualities of the world. Nearer to what Sapir calls the referential.

I'm saying all this about expressive because I do believe it's very important. I believe it has a very important function. Its function in one sense is to *be with*. To be with people. To explore the relationship. To extend the togetherness of situations. It's the language of all ordinary face-to-face speech. So it's our means of coming together with other people out of our essential separateness. But it's also the language in which we first-draft most of our important ideas. In other words, most of the important things that there are in the world were probably first discussed in expressive speech with somebody who was in the context. And if you put those two things together I think you'll see why I claim for it, in the third place, that it's the form of language by which most strongly we influence each other.

I was in New Orleans when Martin Luther King was shot, and of course the talk was everywhere. Talk on street corners

and church porches, in bars, indoors. I really do believe that the quality of that talk, what it was able to achieve in influencing people's opinions, was a material factor in forming public opinion and hence the political outcome of the event. It's far more influential than sermons in church or printed political manifestos.

Expressive writing is primarily written-down speech, and that is, I think, why it is important as writing. Being written-down speech, it does something which I want to describe in two ways. First, it maintains the contact of the writing with the resources the writer has, resources which come from speech. We recruit and keep fit our linguistic resources, above all, through speech. So when we are using expressive language, we are writing in such a way as to maintain the closest contact with those resources. And then saying that same thing a second way, expressive writing is also important because in it, we make sure the writer stays in the writing and doesn't disappear. We'll come back to that.

Nevertheless, writing, even expressive writing, is very different from speech and this is pretty obvious. In speech you have a face-to-face situation. You have immediate feedback. When you are writing, you are left on your own. You have to work in a vacuum with no feedback. You have to imagine your audience and hold him fully in mind if you are to take his needs into account. What's written here and now is to be read there and then: some other time and some other place. I think we need to conjure up an audience for this rather lonely task, and this is one reason why I hold unorthodox views on the role of the teacher with regard to the child's writing. I think the teacher needs to extend to a child a stable audience. I think when a child is learning to write in the first stages, this business of meeting the needs of a reader is one of the real difficulties of coping with writing. The kind of encouragement the teacher can give—in other words, the extent to which the teacher is a good listener, a good reader—can make that easy for a child, and the stability of having the same reader from occasion to occasion is also, I think, very important to those stages.

And then there's the effect of the time lag. You write it here and now, and it's read elsewhere at some other time. How do you use that time lag? How do you use the time lag between the transmission and the reception? In speech, we usually trust

the process of "pushing the boat out." Are we wrong in not trusting it also in writing? How far in writing ought we to have faith in the process you might call "shaping at the point of utterance?" Or how far do you think this premeditation is something we should be much more deliberate about? We all know how expressive speech works; we all know about its importance for children. How in telling about what's been happening to them, for instance, in sharing their experiences, children are also shaping those experiences and therefore making them more accessible for their own learning. We don't learn from higgledy-piggledy events as they strike our senses; we learn from events as we interpret them, and one of the main ways of interpreting them is by talking about them—by giving them shape in language. And the incentive to do that is to share them with somebody else. Can this work with writing? Can the constant audience of the teacher and the even sharper shaping process that goes on when you write about experience—can this—continue to serve for the child as the talk with his parents has served him in infancy?

Let me refer again to "and glad of it." We judged that to be ultimately—I judged that on your behalf—to be ultimately irrelevant. That is, writing as written-down speech won't go the whole way. Something else has to happen side by side with it. I had this something else illustrated to me not too long ago when I was visiting a colleague of mine at home. I was shown a story which my colleague's wife had typed out at the dictation of their four-year-old boy. And the four-year-old boy's story included this sentence: "The king went sadly home for he had nowhere else to go." Well I was very interested in that from a four-year-old because you see "for he had nowhere else to go" is not a speech form. He hadn't heard his parents say that. He hadn't used it in speech. It had come directly to him from the printed page. He hadn't read it but it had been read to him. In other words, he has done what the linguists would call internalized a form of the written language, and he's using it in an appropriate place. He's telling a story. He's using the storyteller's language as he had got it from the printed page by somebody's reading.

And that is the other process that has to go on alongside the written-down speech. As a child extends his reading, so he internalizes more and more the patterns of the written language.

I don't mean that globally—I mean *many forms* of the written language appropriate to many different kinds of tasks. I think this process, once we understand it, needs to be gradual. I think we can easily short-circuit it if we're too deliberate about it. I don't believe in setting the written model for their writing. I believe in reading for reading's sake and the kind of internalization that comes from reading for reading's sake will then articulate, interlink with the spoken resources. The linguistic resources which have in general been recruited at the spoken level. In other words I'm asking for a kind of metabolism. You know, language in any case is outside in the world, not in the child. He has to internalize it in order to speak. There is another internalizing job when it comes to the written form. In both these cases, just as we internalize substances of the world and create our own bodies out of them by a process biologists call metabolism, so we need a metabolic process in internalizing language. In other words it is highly selective and it depends upon internal structures already in existence. It's a personal job, a personal selection and internalizing in terms of individual needs and interests. So I don't think we can hasten it. I think the way in which we treat reading in relation to writing sometimes is in danger of being too deliberate.

Reporting how she made oxygen was for Jacqueline a concern with the outside world. I'm suggesting that this sort of writing makes its best start in the expressive. Here's another little example. This is a ten-year-old country boy who lives in Suffolk.

> On Sunday I made some coal gas. I got a large peanut tin and punched a hole in the top. I filled it one-third full with small bits of coal. Nothing happened when I first put it on the fire, but after a while brown stuff came out. It was gas. I immediately tried to light it, but it did not light. I tried to light it every five minutes. After fifteen minutes it lit. It lasted for eight minutes. My second try lasted one hour three minutes. Each time it did not turn to coke. The back of the tin was red hot.

Well, it's fairly near to speech but he's moving toward the language in which you would expect him to perform the kind of transaction

45

he's after—giving us information. Pretty concrete. How about its shape? Well it simply takes the shape of his activities.

Here's a much later one and a very different one. Another stage in the journey. This is a sixteen-year-old black girl from a school in Connecticut.

> When I first moved into my neighborhood twelve years ago it was a predominantly Jewish community. From the minute I moved in till just a few years ago I was an oddity looking for acceptance. I had no one in my neighborhood I could call a true friend. The air of prejudice hung so heavy in the air it choked the life out of the neighborhood. Slowly I watched the For Sale signs pop up, and gradually I watched most of the Jewish families move out. Until I was about eleven I never knew quite why. But when I was older I realized it was because of my family and the few other black families in the area. And that's why today there is a little hurt left in me from knowing that people can be so thick-headed and narrow-minded they would let false ideas force them to move out of their homes. Today I am fighting to keep myself from inflicting my hurt on someone else and trying not be let prejudice become a part of my life.

Attempting to do a job in the world but a much more advanced job at a much more abstract level. Much more exploratory. Much more a matter of theorizing in order to solve her own problems.

Let me add very briefly, I believe the writing and the reading are complementary processes and we need both. We need to test out in writing what we can do with the written forms, what meaning we can derive from the written forms, what meaning we can communicate in the written forms. The written language forms a gateway to most further learning. And perhaps this becomes of particular importance for children from linguistically deprived homes, from dialect homes; because here will be the first and perhaps the greatest opportunity of coming to terms with this language which will prove so valuable later on.

But all that is only half the story. It's the more familiar half. I want to move on now to what I think is the less familiar

half. And to do that I want to go back to a sort of beginning, a theoretical basis. I've already made brief reference to it. The most fundamental and universal kind of learning for human beings is learning from experience, which means bringing our past to bear upon our present. To do this we need to interpret, to shape, to represent experience. One way of representing, interpreting, and shaping experience is by talking about it. And we all do a great deal of it. Joseph Church, another American psychologist, has this to say about the process: "The morning after the big dance, the telephone system is taxed while the matrons and adolescents exchange impressions until the event has been given verbal shape and so can enter into the corpus of their experience."[2] I'm sorry I can't help smiling about that because he starts off like a human being and finishes like a psychologist, doesn't he? That last idea is the important one I'm after. There is such a thing as "a corpus of experience" and talking does shape experience in such a way as to add to it—no doubt adding to what has in fact also been created largely by talk. There are, of course, many ways of representing the world to ourselves, and language is one of them.

Sapir suggested, many years ago, that we operate in the actual world not directly, but by means of—through the mediation of—a "world picture," a representation of the world. Ernst Cassirer, a German philosopher mostly writing in America, in his book, *An Essay on Man,* reports that, according to a German biologist, man is slower to react to an immediate change in the immediate environment than any other creature is and he puts forward a hypothesis to explain it. He suggests that all creatures have a system of nerves carrying messages from the outside world into themselves and a system of nerves for carrying from themselves to the outside world their responses to those messages. And these two systems are linked together—the incoming stimulus and the outgoing response. But in man, for the first time, a third system is shunted across those two, and that's the symbolic system. A system of representation. So that man receives the signals from the outside world, builds them into his world picture—his representation from past experience of what the world is like—and responds, not directly to the incoming signals, but in the light of his total representation: he responds, in other words, to the incoming signals *as interpreted by the representation.* If that sounds a very involved

process, I can think of a very simple example. If I say to you, as I might well, "I thought I heard somebody coming upstairs," I've expressed my response to an immediate change in the environment in terms heavily clothed in past experience. I think you'd find it very difficult to do it in a way that wasn't. We habitually take the signals in and interpret them in the light of our past experience—of stairways, and people, and the world in general.

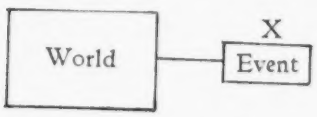
A representation lasts in time in a way events don't. So you can work on it. You can go back over experiences and work on them. Not only you but other people also. When the small boy comes home and tells his mum what's been happening in school, an important part of what he builds into his representation of his day in school is what his mother says as well as what he is saying. So we can affect each other's representations. You might say what I have been doing is to work upon (or try to work upon) your world picture in certain areas to do with schools and children and language.

Representing experience is a cumulative process. Looking back, our representation is a storehouse of past experience, selective of course, not total. But looking forward, that same storehouse is a body of expectations as to what may happen: a sheaf of expectations from which we can draw as appropriate in accordance with the stimulus that meets us. It's a cumulative process, but it's not like a snowball, rolling around gathering more snow on the outside. Because every new experience is liable to demand a change in the picture of the world as a whole. Mostly we can adjust in our stride. If an event is too unlike our expectations we have to respond as best we can, because events don't wait for us; but we are left, after it's over, with an undigested event, an undigested experience.

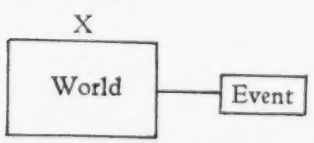
The expectations from which we draw, and which we put to the test in actual experience, are our hypotheses. And we modify our expectations in the light of what happens, just as the scientist puts his hypotheses to the test and modifies them in the light of what happens in the laboratory. So we are actively predicting experience at every moment in the light of this storehouse of past experience.

Let me draw a little picture of your world representation—

the world as you have found it—a nice simple one—and then add an event, something happening to you at the moment.



What's happening to you, you can only interpret in the light of your total representation: in other words the small square is subject to change in the light of what is in the large square. On the other hand, your total world representation is open to modification in the light of any new experience—that is in the light of this (or any other) event. So the large square also is subject to change. Now while the event is happening, you are called upon to *participate* in it. For this reason your attention (represented by "x" in my diagrams) will be focused upon changes to the smaller square: I have suggested that we can normally adjust to new experiences in the course of their happening. But if what happens is too unlike our expectations, then we are left, after the event is over, with an unmodified world representation and an undigested experience—still with a large square and a small square. But suppose the event is *not now happening*. Let me indicate the difference. Here, the small square stands for an event which *has happened* and is being reconstructed in talk. And because it is not now happening, and we do not have to participate in it, we are free to concentrate upon changes in the total world representation, the large square.



The difference of focus is very important: what we now have is a process of surveying the *total* in search of order and harmony and unity.

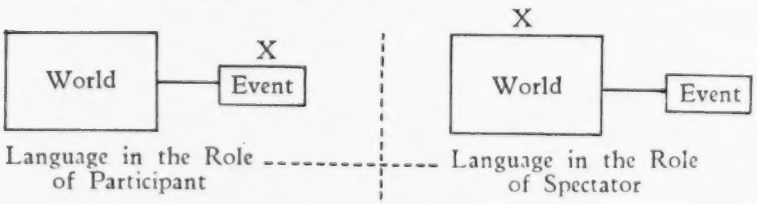
Actually, the whole scheme as I have depicted it is too simple, and I have very briefly to make it more complicated in the light of what sociologists would tell us. Now what the sociologists would point out, of course, is that I've spoken as though this were an *individual* matter, with only very cursory references to mothers and other people. Sociologists will point out that the building of the world is to a great extent done cooperatively. The worlds we build are very like each other in many respects. So they would want to say we build by scanning, interpreting, acting *in* and acting *upon* situations. So that from

joint action in encounters with other people we build a shared social world. I want to see that in two steps: take it first at a momentary level. In any encounter each member of the group interprets the situation in his way and acts in the light of that interpretation. To act, which includes speaking, of course, is to present oneself. So in this encounter, each member of this group is presenting himself. To act is also to *modify* the situation. But *interaction* means that these interpretations and self-presentations embodied in action are offered like pieces in a jigsaw, and it's the fitting together of the jigsaw that in fact confirms and modifies the individual interpretations and shapes the outcome of the encounter.

And now, very briefly look at that as a cumulative process. Day by day and year by year, we classify, further interpret, and store these interpretations and these self-presentations and so construct a social world and an individual personality within it. Thus, when sociologists look at us, the teachers in schools, what they see (and I'm quoting here a young British sociologist called Geoffrey Esland)—what they see is that "the relationship between teachers and pupils is essentially a reality-sharing, world-building enterprise."[3]

I want now to go back to the diagram and add a little to it. The two sides of this page represent two different relationships between *language* and *events*. On the left side, as we said, the events are actually happening, and the language constitutes a part of what is going on, a way of participating in events. Whenever we talk or write or read for some functional purpose—to get things done, to make things happen—we are using "language in the role of participant."

On the right hand side, you will remember, the event is no longer happening: you are going back over it in talk. Therefore, for what I hope will be obvious reasons, I want to call that "language in the role of spectator."



And in theory, at any rate, the distinction is clear. In the role of spectator we use language to reconstruct events, to talk about what is not now going on. However, it is not quite so easy as that. Suppose I invite you to be spectator of my past experience. I had a lovely weekend in New Orleans recently. Suppose I want to talk about it, in order to enjoy it again. I take up the role of spectator of those events for their own sake, for the pleasure of it. I might prevail upon you to listen and then you would take up the role of spectator of my past experience.

On the other hand, I might begin to tell you about my past experiences and after you had listened patiently in the role of spectator, you might suddenly find you were in the wrong role, because what I was doing was working up to asking you to lend me a fiver—working up to raising a loan. A hard luck story. Well that's not the spectator role because that's participation. I am pursuing my practical purposes here, talking to make things happen—and so, participating in events. So even though I'm reconstructing past events, because they are the means to something I am now pursuing, they are not in the role of spectator.

We could contrast that with hospital talk. I don't know whether you've visited a hospital or been in a hospital, but you know on visiting day in hospitals the talk is all about operations, symptoms and illnesses and pains and aches. And all this is spectator role talk. Going back over things in order to come to terms with them—to deal with as yet undigested events. On the other hand, in the doctor's consulting room, you may also reconstruct past experience and talk about your symptoms and your aches and your pains. That's quite different. You are contributing there to a diagnosis. Participant role. And if you got into the kind of vein you would use in the hospital, the doctor would soon recognize it and pull you out.

Another example; think of a party, and the party is over, and you and your fellow hosts are discussing the behavior of your guests in order to discover who it could have been that left a ring on the wash basin. Well that's very helpful of you. It's very useful. You are doing part of the world's work. So you are in the participant role. On the other hand you'll probably find that the conversation soon drifts into another vein, and you find yourselves discussing the behavior of your guests in order to *enjoy*

51

their behavior in a way you couldn't when they were still behaving. And that's pure spectator role.

We can take up the role of spectator of our own past experiences and since you can of mine and I can of yours, we can become spectator of other people's experiences, real or unreal. Spectator of imagined experiences. Spectator of our own possible futures in our daydreams. So I'm including under this role of spectator a whole range of possibilities. In spectator role, we are free from the need to interact. Our attention is upon events that are not happening, interactions with people that are not now present. (We are, of course, in a situation and interacting with our listener. But we are minimizing our interaction. We may offer him a drink as he listens to the story, but this is likely to be felt as an interruption to what we really are doing—which is to concern ourselves with events not now happening, for the sake of doing so.) Free then from the need to interact, we use that freedom, I suggest, first of all to pay attention to *forms* in a way that we don't when we participate. And the forms of language, particularly.

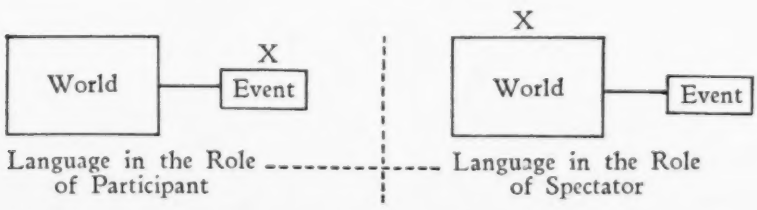
If we are in a spectator role, then the way you tell your story is part of my enjoyment in it, and the forms of language and the way you form language will be an essential part of what you are doing. And particularly this is true of the form or pattern of feelings. You know, if a mother during the day has a small son to look after who gets into all kinds of trouble, the feelings aroused in her are likely to be above all sparked off in action. But when her husband comes home in the evening, as long as he knows the boy is safely tucked up in bed, he loves to hear about the hairbreadth escapes. They both now are in spectator role. They can both enter into and appreciate the feelings of fear and anxiety and horror and excitement and pride, and so on in a way you can't when you're participating. One is somehow able to savor feeling *as feeling* in a spectator role in a way one isn't free to savor it in a participant role.

And finally, something not unconnected with that. We also use the participant role to evaluate. We bring onto the agenda of our talk with neighbors and other people a great deal of human experience by taking up the spectator role. I suggest that we take up the spectator role out of need—when we need to go back and come to terms with undigested experience. But we also take it

up for fun and pleasure—because we never cease to long for more lives than the one we've got. We've only got one life as participants. As spectators, countless lives are open to us. They are extensions of our own. And what is afoot when we are extending our experience into each other's as we gossip is above all an exploration of values. As I recount a story of events, I'm offering evaluations and I am looking to you listening to me to come back with your evaluations. I want to establish this as an important feature, because I believe we are dealing with a basic social satisfaction.[4]

I've suggested that in the spectator role we show a concern for the total world picture, a concern for the total context into which every experience has to be fitted. I've suggested that creating a world is to some extent a social process. Now the physical part of our world is very easy to corroborate. Corroboration that you have the same idea of this room as I do isn't going to be difficult. Where our world pictures are likely to be held vulnerable is not in the physical features, it's in the value system. It's in what we feel and believe about the world that we hold our world picture most privately and tentatively. So we're always offering evaluations to other people to see how they evaluate and in so doing are gaining the basic social satisfaction of having our value system, as it were, checked and calibrated against those of other people.

I now want to complete the diagram by adding a reference to the principal functions, or uses, of language, as we categorized them for the purposes of our research on writing.



The middle term is one we've already talked about a good deal—the expressive function. Loosely structured, equally at home in the spectator role or the participant role—language close to the

self. We saw Jacqueline attempting to meet the demands of a participant role, attempting to get something *done*. The kind of writing that fully meets such demands we labeled—for very obvious reasons—"transactional." It is important to see the line in the diagram as a continuous scale, a spectrum. We've already noticed that as the expressive moves towards the transactional, it has to make more explicit reference to the outside world. The personal features that are not relevant are omitted, and more of the context is filled in for somebody who is not in it already, not face to face sharing the same situations and events.

So those are the kinds of changes that go on as "expressive" moves out to "transactional." I could say a lot more about the transactional, but I'm going to leave that, because the important things I want to discuss come on the other half of the diagram.

From the expressive to the poetic. In other words, language in the spectator role. Once again, as a piece of expressive writing changes to meet in full the demands of the spectator role, it changes from expressive writing to what I want to label "poetic." I don't mean rhymes. I don't mean meter. I don't mean poetry in the usual sense: poetry is certainly at the core of it, but is not the whole of it. By poetic I mean language as art—poetic in the original Greek sense, something made, a verbal object. So as we move from the expressive to the poetic, once more meeting the demands of a wider audience, once more language gets further away from self, but in a quite different way because for a quite different purpose. The personal features are given wider meaning as they enter into a very intricate complex organization. Because the further you move along this scale towards the poetic, the greater is the attention paid to forms, to the organization of form. The forms of language, but also the forms of events, the plot of the novel, the pattern of feelings—forms in general. So what you are doing is to create an artifact, a verbal object. And it's this refinement of organization that gives personal features a kind of resonance by which they have meaning for an unknown audience. Transactional language is language that gets things done, language as a means. Poetic language is a construct, not a means but an end in itself. So language in the role of spectator is a spectrum that stretches, as far as the written language is concerned, from an

intimate letter, a way of "being with" someone, writing in the expressive, to literature: novels, poetry, drama.

I'm saying in part what has often enough been said before. It was said very elegantly by W. H. Auden about poetry.

> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its saying where executives
> Would never want to tamper.[5]

Poetry makes nothing happen. It's not transactional. One last point about that. I think perhaps I can make this clearer by contrasting the way we contextualize a piece of language, or make it our own. You know we have our own ongoing purposes. If a piece of language is to mean anything to us at all we have somehow to incorporate it in those ongoing purposes. In other words we have to contextualize it.

With transactional language, what goes on is *piecemeal* contextualization. If you read a piece of transactional language—an article on a subject such as how to teach composition, or this piece of mine—then you take what you want from it and leave the rest. You pick a bit here, you leave all this because you don't accept it or you knew it already. You pick here, you pick there, you make new relations between those bits, and you make your own relations between those and what you already know and think. That is piecemeal contextualization. What a writer of poetic language has to do at all cost is to avoid that piecemeal contextualization. What he's after is contextualization *as a whole*. In other words he wants to resist contextualization until the poetic object has been built up by his reader. He wants a hard skin around it.

Of course we do respond to literature in this piecemeal fashion. I've heard children reading Yeats say, "Oh, I didn't know Yeats was a spiritualist." Or even reading other poems say, "Oh, I didn't know there were camels in Tibet." We do contextualize literature piecemeal. There is no reason why we shouldn't. But we do it knowing that we are not playing the game for which the poem is written. In order to do that we need to resist this piecemeal contextualization. It doesn't matter whether there are really camels in Tibet—there are camels in Tibet in the poem and that's all that matters.

And yet, of course, we do in the end have to contextualize a piece of poetic writing. A novel can incorporate a message. What we must do is resist the piecemeal interpretation of that message because the message is embodied in the construct. When we have reconstructed the verbal construct, then we can make that our own—and I would call that global contextualization.

I want to stress the importance of that spectrum from the expressive to the poetic. I think I can illustrate this with two pieces which represent, in a sense, poles. They're both expressive still, but they're both moving towards the poetic in very different ways. One was sent to us from Canada from the Jessie Catcham Primary School in Toronto. It was written by a boy whose father and mother had in fact been killed in a road accident. And this is what he wrote:

> Once upon a time there was a little boy and he didn't have a mother or father. One day he was walking in the forest. He saw a rabbit. It led him to a house.
>
> There was a book inside the house. He looked at the book and saw a pretty animal. It was called a "horse." He turned the page and saw a picture of a rabbit . . . a rabbit just like he had seen in the forest. He turned the page again and saw a cat. He thought of his mother and father, and when he was small and they had books for him and animals for him to play with. He thought about this and he started to cry.
>
> While he was crying a lady said "What's the matter boy." He slowly looked around and saw his mother.
>
> He said, "Is it really you?"
>
> "Yes, my son. I'm your mother."
>
> "Mother, mother . . . are you alive?"
>
> "No child. This is the house that I was killed in."
>
> "Oh mother why are you here?"
>
> "Because I came back to look for you."
>
> "Why mother? Why did you come back to look for me."
>
> "Because I miss you."
>
> "Where is father?"
>
> "He is in the coffin that he was buried in. But don't

talk about that now. How are you son? You're bigger . . . I'm glad to see you."

"It's been a long time mother."

While the boy and the mother were talking his father came into the room and said "Hi son. How are you?"

"Fine," said the boy, "fine."

Suddenly the mother and father came to life.

The boy was crying, and the mother and father were crying too. God suddenly gave them a miracle . . . to come to life. The boy looked at the mother and father and said, "Oh Mother, oh Father."

Well, spectator role taken from *need*—in order to repair as far as you can the fragmenting of your picture of the world, to come to terms with events. But as I said, the spectator role is not only used from need. We habitually take it up for much more commonplace and enjoyable reasons. Here's a very different example written by another boy. An eleven-year-old boy called Malcolm in a school very near where I am working in London:

"Sir, can I have two pieces of paper?"

"Yes you can, Malcolm. What do you want it for?"

"To do a picture of a tiger, sir."

"All right then, Malcolm."

It took me two weeks to do that picture, but when he was finished he was Lord of the Jungle, he was magnificent. Lord of lords, Master of Masters.

The way I felt I just could not describe, but it was just the way Miss Harford felt. [Miss Harford was his English teacher.] Well, no one in this world could describe him, only someone out of this world could describe him. He was magnificent.

Poetry is a form of celebration. That is a celebration well within the expressive, but moving in the direction of poetry.

Everyone wants children to learn language to get things done, you know—even politicians and economists. If we as English teachers do not foster the kind of language which represents a concern for the total world-picture, the total context into which

every new experience that comes to a child—a man—has to be fitted, then I don't know who will.

I am going to finish very briefly by picking up one or two points. I've suggested that as there is a metabolism of the body, so there must be a metabolism of the mind in learning. A child must draw from the environment (which includes books and teachers) but draw selectively in accordance with the structure of his own personality. In other words, learning has an organic shape. Like a plant or a coral. As teachers we very often think of the shape of learning as though it were frost on the boughs we provide or barnacles on the bottom of our boats.

A child's learning has its own organic structure. Hence, the value of writing in the expressive, which is the language close to and most revealing of that individuality. Hence, also, the importance of individual work and work in small groups, and of the sea of talk on which all our school work should be floated.

Given these conditions I want to suggest that children learn to write above all by writing. This is an operational view of writing in school. The world about the child waits to be written about, so we haven't the need to go hunting around for exercises or dummy runs. We have to set up a working relationship between his language and his experience, and there is plenty there to write about. An operational view implies that we have our priorities. Of course we care about spelling and punctuation, but not more than we care about what the language is doing for the child.

Reading and writing and talking go hand in hand. And development comes from the gradual internalization of the written forms so our standards, the standards we apply to their writing, must be such as to take care that we don't cut the writer out of the writing; or to put that another way, cut the writer off from his resources at the spoken level. Development comes in two main directions—towards the transactional and towards the poetic. And in either case, if we are successful, children will continue to write *as themselves* as they reach those two poles. Their explorations of the outer world demand the transactional; their explorations of the inner world demand the poetic, and the roots of it all remain in the expressive.

We don't often write anything that is merely communication. There's nearly always an element of "finding out," of exploration.

So it's a very common process for us to be able to read into our own writing something which we weren't fully aware of before we started to write. Writing can in fact be learning in the sense of discovery. But if we are to allow this to happen, we must give more credit than we often do to the process of shaping at the point of utterance and not inhibit the kind of discovery that can take place by insisting that children know exactly what they are going to say before they come to say it.

I want again to mention the importance of writing in the spectator role. Chaos is most painful in the area of values and beliefs. Therefore the harmonizing, the order-seeking effects of writing and reading on the poetic end of the spectrum are highly educational, important processes.

And then finally the teacher as listener. We must be careful not to sacrifice to our roles as error spotters and improvers and correctors that of the teacher as listener and reader. I could sum it all up very simply. What is important is that children in school should write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them.

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59

Teaching Children about Language

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In his poem, "Dover Beach," Matthew Arnold wrote:

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world.

Matthew Arnold published "Dover Beach" in 1867, about a generation after Charles Darwin wrote an abstract of his theory of biological evolution. Arnold knew that an era had passed, that Western civilization—as he noted in 1855—was "wandering between two worlds, one dead,/The other powerless to be born." While other men were looking eagerly ahead to a bright future, one where science would provide answers to eternal questions, Arnold—a most humane man—paused to look back at the dead past. He took time to feel regret, to communicate this regret to us, before going on, as the British invariably do, with the business of life.

The business of life includes, among many other things, the teaching of children. Old beliefs may die, and we may pause to regret their passing, but then there is always the job of teaching to be done.

And teaching is an act of faith, the kind of faith that never seems to die. If we place our faith in technology or even science itself, we will eventually have cause for regret. But if we place our faith in young people, and in teaching young people, we may sometimes feel disappointment but we will rarely feel regret.

This has been a lengthy introduction, and perhaps it even sounds like a conclusion. But I have reasons for beginning with these observations. I want to establish a historical context for

discussing *teaching* and *language*. Specifically I want to provide a sense of past, present, and future.

If we look at history, we can see many particular reasons for teaching children. The earliest teaching, for example, had a moral and even religious function. This function was preserved as society became more complex, but we added other functions—we sought to provide those skills required by society. Sometimes the skills were social, sometimes technical.

An examination of school grammars will support these observations. Many ancient grammars had moral and religious implications, while those produced during the last two hundred years have generally been more concerned with society than with religion. Certainly the most important of the early English grammars, Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) had major social implications in the eighteenth century and after.

We can also consider the changes that the industrial revolution caused in the schools. Society required people who were trained in technology, the practical sciences, and even the needs of the business community. In a similar way, after the Russian *sputnik* was sent into orbit, society began to emphasize the teaching of physics and mathematics.

But all these reasons—religious, social, technological, and commercial—relate to the particular needs of a given society at a specific time. Underlying these particular reasons, there is a general reason for teaching children, and this general reason remains constant: we hope to prepare children to live, as fully as possible, in *their* world of the future.

As I've suggested, a change in particular reasons frequently arises from a restructuring of society or from a major development in science, especially if the development has social implications. (I had this fact in mind earlier when I referred to Darwin.) In the twentieth century, we've witnessed several scientific developments of this kind. Releasing the power of the atom is perhaps the most awesome example, but there have been major advances in other fields as well—cybernetics, medicine, transportation, and so on. But future generations may well decide that the most important developments, those which had the greatest effect upon society, were not in the fields of physics, medicine, or technology, but were, rather, in the study of language.

At this point, I must get personal. Language is not my field. I took my undergraduate and graduate degrees in literature. Unlike most of my colleagues who also teach courses in the English language, I have only an amateur's knowledge of Old and Middle English. I am primarily interested in the creative process—the creative act—in what "goes on" in the minds of an author and a sensitive reader. This interest led me, quite reluctantly at first, to the study of language.

Initially, (this was in the middle fifties) I was dismayed by what I found. In fact, I was repelled by the taxonomy, the classifications, the *deadness* of it all. I found very little that would be valuable for children to know, and very little that would help me understand the creative *act*. There was no action at all.

But then linguists began to develop some ideas about "grammatical transformations." These ideas challenged a number of people, and the ten years following 1957 were exciting ones in the study of language. They were, in my opinion, the culmination of what many persons have called "the language revolution." In the early 1960s, then, I returned to the study of language, and since that time I've found enough that relates to the creative process, and to children, to keep me working in the field. Here I'll introduce an aside, a comment that I'll return to later. Although I found language study exciting, I did *not* approve of the way linguistic research was being used in the schools.

I've said the "language revolution" may be more important than the "atomic revolution" in physics. George Steiner, a social critic who also uses the term "language revolution," suggests why this might be so. "The new linguistics," he says, "arose from a drastic crisis of language: the mind loses confidence in the act of communication itself" ("The Language Animal," in *Extraterritorial* [New York: Atheneum, 1971] p. 71). In other words, man—at least Western man—is beginning to lose faith in language. Controlling the power of the atom is, as I've said, awesome; but losing the ability to communicate is more than awesome—it's literally annihilating. If we should lose this ability, then we would have a hostile, constantly threatening world of men who make, as a Russian poet has said, "funny animal sounds." In such a world, we would no longer be human.

I take it as a fact, then, that there has been a language revolu-

tion, and moreover, that this revolution has already begun to change society. These changes will be no less significant than those caused by the Newtonian revolution in the seventeenth century or by the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century. Our great need today is not for more scientists, nor is it for more managers. On the West Coast, scientists with Ph.D. degrees are on welfare; in Texas, they're driving taxicabs. Our schools of business and law cannot place all their graduates. In other words, our need is not for increasingly more people who can discover, who can produce, who can administer. We need, rather, people who can communicate with each other. We must learn to talk with each other. If we don't learn, it may soon become impossible to talk. And as Herman Melville showed us in *Billy Budd*, this leads to brutality and death.

If we look at the schools, we can see some of the changes already caused by the language revolution. But we must look closely. The educational establishment in this country is massive, employing more than a million people, and change takes place very slowly. Nor is change always orderly or even, at first, in the right direction. Here I have in mind the introduction of so-called "linguistics" into textbooks used in the schools.

These textbooks began to appear in the mid-1950s. In some cases, publishers simply deleted sections on traditional grammar from existing textbooks and replaced these sections with rather stark lessons on structural grammar—the "linguistics" of the 1950s. But there were problems with all these early textbooks. The most obvious problem concerned terminology: some overly zealous writers abandoned 200 years of tradition, and in doing so found that they didn't agree with each other or even, sometimes, with themselves. In short, the change was far from orderly.

But I have a more serious criticism. I believe that the early manifestations of change were not in the right direction. The textbooks were not so much *using* the findings of linguistic scholars; rather, as I read them, they were attempting to make children—and sometimes teachers—into miniature linguists. And the reasons for this seem obvious enough.

At about the same time that we introduced linguistics into the schools, we also introduced the "new mathematics" and such subjects as the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) program

in physics. These programs aimed at training young scientists; they enable children—as the jargon has it—to *do* science. And I think this was right; that is, I think that's what society wanted about a dozen years ago. So a program to train children in the methodology of linguistics—a program that would have them *do* linguistics—probably seemed reasonable in the late fifties and early sixties. But in my opinion, such linguistic programs were a false start. We needed change, yes; but not *that* kind of change.

At this point in my historical sketch, we begin to get the first publications in tranformational-generative grammar, but these books, in my opinion, were disappointing. In particular, I believe that they, like their predecessors in the mid-1950s, attempted to make children into miniature linguists. I can think of only one word to characterize such an attempt. The whole venture seems silly.

My almanac indicates that there are 56 million children enrolled in grades one through twelve in this country. I suggest (keeping as straight a face as possible) that we don't need 56 million—in fact, 200 million—people who can communicate with each other. And here there's an apparent paradox. If you've read many articles or books written by linguists, then you've surely noticed that at times many of them—many of these "scientists of language"—can't even communicate among themselves.

But there's something for us to learn in this paradox. A linguist, like any one of us, is a product of our schools as they were in the immediate past. In a more or less efficient way, schools prepare children to assume roles in society; that is, the subjects we emphasize in schools are generally those which society believes, at the time, to be important. When many of today's linguists, particularly the younger ones, were school children, society placed great value on the physical sciences and also on mathematics. I believe that these "linguists-to-be" certainly understood (as children always do) which subjects in the curriculum were the important ones. And they also understood that subjects such as literature and composition were less important; that is, less important in the view of society *as it was then.*

I was teaching freshman college students in the late 1950s. If you were teaching too, you'll probably remember many instances when students actually objected to criticism of their writing. "I

know it's not good grammar, but—y'know—you can tell what I mean." My criticism of these students was not so much concerned with correct usage as it was with incoherence. I did *not* know what they meant. And of course, some of these students grew up to become linguists. Others became physicists, doctors, lawyers, and even educators. Actually, this is praise—not condemnation—of the educational system. It works. Society wanted scientists and engineers, and by God, the schools ground them out ahead of schedule.*

Now society is changing again. In particular, there is some evidence that society is losing faith in science, that our faith is retreating as Arnold said, "down the vast edges . . . of the world." Science, we are perhaps beginning to believe, should be a servant and not master. Science is something to be *used*. Thus, with respect to language teaching, it seems to me that we should not require children to engage in linguistic research, nor should we require them to work with the complex formulas that are one minor result of this research. In short, the methods of teaching children about mathematics or physics should not be carried over, wholesale, to teaching children about language.

My historical survey has now arrived at the present, and before looking ahead to the future, I think it would be worthwhile to summarize the important results of this survey.

1. In this century, we are witnessing a language revolution which arose, in part, from a sense of crisis. We have begun to lose confidence in the act of communication.
2. The schools respond to the needs of society. They train children to fill the roles which people believe to be important for the efficient operation of society. Whenever possible, such training is provided in addition to other types of training that were important in the past and that continue to be important, for example, education in cultural and moral values.
3. Like similar revolutions in other fields such as physics

* For an extended documentation of these observations, see Herbert J. Muller, *Children of Frankenstein: A Primer on Modern Technology and Human Values* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).

and industrial production, the language revolution is changing society, and the schools are slowly responding to this change.

4. The early attempts to introduce linguistics into the schools were well intentioned, that is, they sought to respond to a social need, but they were also misguided in that they were patterned after programs which were designed to train scientists.

I believe each of these observations can be supported by a considerable body of evidence.

Like Matthew Arnold, I would now like to look back and pay my respects to the past. Our successes and even our failures did, after all, bring us to the present. We have, in fact, provided many solutions to problems that affected earlier generations. For example, we've conquered smallpox, polio, and many other diseases.

I have considerable respect for these accomplishments. Yet we have not produced the bright future, the utopia, that many of Matthew Arnold's contemporaries dreamed of. Clearly, we have our own problems. While the physical sciences may help us with some of them such as pollution, I suspect there are others, for example, the ghettos, where pure science and technology may prove inadequate. We've all heard the plaintive comment: "If we can put a man on the moon, we can surely solve the problem of the ghettos." But I suggest the ghettos are a different kind of problem, one that has to do not with knowledge but with understanding. And the problem of understanding has its roots in the crisis of language.

What have we learned from the past that applies to the present, and more importantly, to the future? I've said on other occasions that the primary insight of linguistic research has very little to do with any given set of rules and formulas. Rather, I believe this insight relates to the nature of the human mind, and more specifically to the hypothesis that language is a biological phenomenon. I must go carefully here. The hypothesis is akin to an inductive generalization, one made possible by observing language acquisition and language use. There is considerable evidence to support the hypothesis and none, to the best of my knowledge, to contradict it. Yet like all hypotheses which range widely across the physical

or intellectual world (e.g., Einstein's theory of relativity) this hypothesis remains to be proved.

But we need not wait—and, in my opinion, we cannot wait—until this hypothesis is conclusively established as fact. To do so would be to misunderstand everything we've learned about science in the last 300 years. While recognizing that further research may produce modifications, we must also recognize that this is the nature of "normal science." If, or rather *when*, the hypothesis is superseded, it can only be by one which is even more comprehensive, one which can explain not only the facts we can observe now but other facts that lie outside our present field of vision. I am particularly impressed by some of the work being done in sociolinguistics, work which may expand our knowledge of the speech *act* considerably.

Yet even now we can use the biological hypotheses to help us explain the fact that every individual constructs and understands sentences which he or she has never heard before and has never been taught, and which cannot possibly be the result of "conditioned learning" as that term is used in behavioral psychology.

On other occasions, I've drawn an analogy between learning a language and going through puberty. Something in the biological structure of each child causes that child, at the age of twelve or so, to begin the process that we call "going through puberty": that is, each child develops those characteristics which permit reproduction of the species. We should note that intelligence has nothing to do with this process, except in the most trivial way. The process of acquiring language seems to function in a similar way. Through means which are still unknown to us, each child acquires the ability to use language. That is, each child constructs a complex internal grammar of a language.

Obviously, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done before we can specify either the exact nature of an individual's internal knowledge or the means by which he acquires this knowledge. But there's no doubt that each school child *has* linguistic ability.

The hypothesis about the "biological foundations of language" helps explain the empirical fact that any child can learn any language as a "first language." And this fact suggests that, from a linguistic point of view, all dialects are equal; that is, all

language—and all dialects of all languages—are equally complex in their structure. In other words, the notion of "standard spoken English" is sociological rather than linguistic.

I'll return to this statement later. First, I believe it's important to make a distinction between *having* language and *using* language, or, to cite two other terms with approximately the same meaning, between *knowing* and *doing*. Thus, we may know what's right in a particular situation, but we don't always do what's right. In a similar sense, we may have the ability to reproduce, but having the ability doesn't mean that we must use this ability, or if we do, that we'll use the ability wisely or well.

I suggest there's something for us to learn here, and I expect you can anticipate what I'm going to say. I'll say it colloquially: The problem is not getting language *into* a child's head; rather, the problem is getting language *out*.

Again, I want to be very careful. In the past, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was a social and even economic necessity to get a standard form of language *into* the heads of many children. This, at least, is what society insisted on at the time, since there was no widely used standard spoken form and since such a form was required for the economic operation of society. (The ambiguity of "economic operation" is intentional.) The schools did a remarkable job in meeting this socially defined need. For example, I doubt that most of you can identify the dialect I spoke as a preschool child. I did, of course, speak much the way my parents spoke, and my mother was from Tidewater Virginia while my father was reared in the Appalachian Mountains. I learned to speak my particular variety of standard English after coming to school.

Nor am I suggesting that society can do without some standard form of language. Certainly, we need to help all children learn to read and write that rather artificial form we call "standard written English"—which (we should note) is not *spoken* by anyone. But I do suggest that this is not our only need, and perhaps not even our primary need. To repeat: what we need is people who can communicate with each other. I am *not* convinced that the way to satisfy this need is by imposing some homogenized form on all *speakers* of English. It may well be that "standard spoken English"—what one of my friends calls "network English"—will

become a kind of *lingua franca*. But this will happen only if all persons willingly and knowingly agree that it should be so.

In other words, I claim that the establishment of one spoken form of English as *the* dialect of national commerce and politics is a social question—a question which must be debated and resolved within the framework of representative government. In this view, schools are *not* responsive to society. (As I've suggested, schools change only slowly.) There are virtually no exceptions to the observation that we are still teaching language for reasons which prevailed 200 years ago: that is, we are insisting that the needs of society require every child to master some standard form of speech even at the expense of losing his own dialect, as, for all practical purposes, I have done along with millions of others. In short, the schools are generally *insisting* on a requirement that is being widely and hotly debated.

The crisis of language is probably a major factor in the so-called "crisis of identity" which is one of the serious problems of the twentieth century. I suggest that this problem, in at least one sense, is a luxury. That is, in earlier centuries there was very little time for most persons even to consider the question of their own "identity." Society determined who they were and what they were to do. And such persons, in order to survive, spent most of their time in this "doing." We can find many examples in literature; Bob Cratchit, from Dickens' "Christmas Carol," is a typical case. In other words, I suggest that technology and advances in the standard of living now make it possible for the majority of Americans and, perhaps, even of Western Europeans to question who, in fact, they are.

The question of identity is at the center of George Orwell's novel, *1984* (and we're little more than a decade away from that fateful year). In a somewhat different sense, it's related to Alvin Toffler's observations in *Future Shock*. Toffler, of course, is more optimistic than Orwell. He rejects the notion that we are inevitably headed toward a totalitarian society of interchangeable human beings. While I believe Toffler is right—that he senses the current needs of society—I'm not yet willing to agree that we will inevitably achieve the goal he envisions. We will only do so through the efficacy of the schools. In short, the schools must change.

The question, of course, is *how?* And now we come, finally, to look into the future.

For practical reasons, I shall limit my remarks about a future curriculum to subject matter. First, then, let us consider the so-called "English language arts." For several generations, these have been divided into reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As I've suggested on several earlier occasions, I believe we need to reexamine the assumptions which underlie this division, and more specifically, we need to restructure them in relation to the current needs of society. Although alternative approaches to the problem are possible, I prefer one which divides the subject matter of the English curriculum into two parts: the arts of English and the skills of English. Broadly, we can say that the arts of English are humanistic while the skills are primarily social. And in practice, "social" generally refers to the middle and upper-middle classes of society.

In this sense, reading is both an art and a skill. That is, when we are teaching children to read, when we are helping them learn that symbols on a page have a relation to language, then we are giving them a skill. While there is considerable debate over the best method of teaching this skill, there seems to be a widespread consensus that acquiring the skill of reading is necessary for all members of society—not just for the middle class. But reading, in the sense of responding to great works of literature, is more than a skill; it is also an art.

Similar distinctions can also be made with respect to writing, speaking, and listening. Writing is a skill if we are referring to mechanics: spelling, neatness, punctuation, and so on. Again, as with reading, there seems to be widespread agreement that all children should acquire these skills. But writing is also an art if we're referring to the use of the creative imagination or even to such things as clarity and forcefulness in factual writing.

Thus, when we say that Shakespeare was a "great writer," we certainly don't mean that his penmanship was artistic. It wasn't. Nor was he consistent in spelling; he even spelled his own name in a variety of ways. Clearly, we're referring to the art of his writing—his ability to communicate—rather than to his mechanical skills. We can make similar observations about "factual" writers such as Samuel Johnson, Charles Darwin, William James, and others.

Some of you might object at this point. In effect, you might say, "Yes, we certainly admire their art. But they would never have become writers if they hadn't first learned the mechanical skills." For the cases I've cited, the objection has some validity, but I'm not sure it applies with equal force to contemporary society. These men were all of the middle class to begin with; moreover, the needs of their societies were, in several important ways, different from our needs. And for another answer to the objection, I can cite Emily Dickinson, whose spelling, handwriting, and punctuation deviated markedly from the standards of her time.

Once again, I must be extremely careful. I am *not* advocating that we banish the skills from the English curriculum. Rather, I'm suggesting that in our teaching, we need to distinguish carefully between arts and skills, and we need to help our students perceive the difference. In this regard, I also suggest that learning to manipulate linguistic formulas—learning, for example, how to use a highly detailed linguistic model that generates sentences in a precise and step-by-step fashion—is also a skill, and I'm far from convinced that acquiring such a skill is necessary, although it might be interesting, as an option, for some children. Yet there's an important sense in which linguistics does relate to the arts of English.

Contemporary linguistics, particularly the type known as transformational-generative grammar, has provided some quite significant insights into the nature of language, into the process of acquiring language, and into the relationships that exist among various dialects. These insights relate to the nature of the human mind, and that fact alone makes them humanistic and connects them with the arts of English.

For years, teachers have told children—some children—that they don't know language, or—what amounts to the same thing—that they don't know grammar. The teachers believed what they were saying, and they also believed it was their job to teach language, or grammar, to these children. What the teachers meant, of course, was that these children didn't know the standard spoken and written form used in middle class society—or more properly, that these children didn't *use* this standard dialect in their writing and speaking. (Here I'm making the distinction, referred to earlier, between *having* and *using*, between *knowing* and *doing*.)

We now know that these teachers had, at best, a limited

vision. Language, as I've said, is a biological phenomenon. A child acquires language in a process analogous to the acquisition of sexual characteristics—that is, in a wholly natural way. In terms of its structure, the dialect a child acquires is neither more nor less complex than any other dialect or, for that matter, any other language. Each child's dialect has a highly detailed and specific grammar.

Language is not only a biological phenomenon; it serves a biological function. I believe that language enhances man's ability to survive, both as an individual and as a species. This hypothesis helps to explain why people are so sensitive about the subject of language, so diffident in using language, so defensive about what they perceive as threats to their language. Each individual's sense of personal identity is intimately associated with his language, although generally on an unconscious level. On the conscious level, people are generally *not* aware that their knowledge of language is truly extraordinary. (And we, as teachers, are partly responsible for this lack of awareness.) Because of the importance of language to the individual, and also because of the lack of awareness, many—perhaps most—persons feel threatened when they encounter a different dialect. And the threat is directly related to their own sense of personal identity. It's as if someone said, "Your language may be adequate for surviving in some marginal way, but you won't be a full and complete human being until you abandon your language and adopt mine." Such a notion might well be damaging for children.

I believe we must help children recognize that they have innate linguistic knowledge. When they recognize that they *have* such knowledge, then, in my opinion, they can begin to *use* language more effectively. In other words, when children understand that they *know* language, they will be able to improve the things they *do* with language—reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Literature can help in this process of "getting language out." Literature provides models, not in the imitative sense, but rather by demonstrating the power and the range of possibilities inherent in the act of communication. Children who are aware of their own linguistic ability can admire the way writers express their emotions and ideas—their identities. Children can also learn more about their own emotions and ideas—learn more about themselves—through reading literature.

74

Similar observations can be made about composition, that is, the *act* of composing, whether this act involves writing, speaking, or even pantomime. In my experience, children who are confident of their innate knowledge are willing—even eager—to accept the help of a teacher in bringing this knowledge out, in gaining better control over their performance.

I thought for some time before deciding on the phrase: gaining better control. The phrase has a variety of implications. Thus, acquiring mechanical skills of writing and spelling may well be—and probably is—an important part of gaining control, at least within middle class society. But we must not extend the implications too far. While it *may* be valuable for speakers of a nonstandard dialect to "gain control" of a standard spoken dialect, we must recognize that this is a social—and not *necessarily* a "humane"—observation. And as a social question, it must, as I've suggested, be fully and objectively debated by all members of society. The failure to conduct such a debate could well be catastrophic.

Once again I've used a strong term, but I have reasons and they relate to my understanding of the word *communication*. For communication to be fully effective, there must be a common understanding between the persons speaking. Furthermore, every act of communication involves each individual's sense of identity. In short, language is a way of *being* in the world.

While "the style is the man," I think it is equally true that "the speech is the child." And we must be extraordinarily careful when we deal with children's speech. We must remember "the crisis of language." We must, I believe, help children and young people acquire a sense of confidence in their innate linguistic ability.

Like any sea, the Sea of Faith changes but it also remains the same. I have faith that we can learn to respect our own linguistic abilities, that we can help others learn to respect theirs, and most importantly, that from this combination of self-respect and mutual respect we can also learn to communicate with each other, to *use* language humanely.

Selfconscious Writers and Black Folk and Cultural Tradition

George E. Kent

76

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A folk is a group of people who have had a common basis of life over a period of hundreds of years, under conditions which have required an intimate sharing of definitions of existence. The essential condition is some form of isolation—frequently geographical, but in this instance, psychological. In other words, enough of an isolation to force them to be creative in their definitions, whether the definitions are wholly fabricated by them or adapted and infused with a spirit that makes them new.

Such definitions move at great depths. Ralph Ellison in his book *Shadow and Act* has pointed out that they cover the situations that a group has most frequently had to face, imply the values which make up a concept of the good life, and attempt to define the essence of existence. It is a supra-scientific attempt to look upon the dark woods of life, the sunlight-cloud streaked aspects of existence, the terrors of an indifferent universe—and to humanize them. A folk tradition is filled with ritual and myth, whose function is to back off chaos and create a sharply human sort of knowing. A folk tradition is thus literally a group achievement. The folk artist is thus automatically equipped with the knowledge of the vibrations and responses of the group.

In contrast, what I am calling the *selfconscious* writer comes usually after the establishment of a folk tradition. As an individual he writes alone and hopes that the vibrations which he confronts in his solitude, by being invasions and reflections of his deepest self, will also provide the shock of recognition for other men. You and I would be selfconscious writers—in our makeup almost helplessly more aware of our "individualism," our "apartness" than of our group-relatedness, readier to set aside group definitions where they cross step individual quest and even whimsy.

No romanticism, please. The situation is one of degree. I do not assume that persons in a folk culture have *no* sense of individualism or apartness. It's a matter of degree.

Until his folk tradition is absorbed, the selfconscious writer, of course, has access to it—especially if no special circumstance has

placed him at too great distance from racial or group memory. But, at a certain time, the selfconscious works of writers give at least the illusion of massive absorption of folk and cultural tradition—one which suggests that the powerful works resulting from a fusion of the writer's folk tradition, his own deepest consciousness, and the vision and techniques drawn from selected examples of other selfconscious writings have reached a point beyond which the writer can no further go.

Thus we may say, although some resourceful writer may yet overthrow the proposition, that as selfconscious writers Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain and William Faulkner render and impose the illusion that the white American folk tradition has received its massive exploitation. (They also, of course, made impressive forays into black folk tradition, but most effectively when they were, directly or indirectly, defining whites.) A bit of reflection will suggest a relationship rich with opportunities, which can exist between the selfconscious writer and folk and cultural tradition. Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Margaret Walker, among others, reflect a very conscious study of it.

Since what I wish to focus upon is black selfconscious writers and black folk and cultural tradition, I shall attempt to make the relationship clear largely through examples of the efforts of black writers.

The black folk and cultural tradition ranges from simple folksayings to a variety of insights rendered in traditional forms.

In terms of form, we think of spirituals, dances, jubilee songs, blues, ballads of hard driving men and women, work songs, riddles, folk sermons, folktales, religious testimonials, toasts, children's games, and conjure and supernatural tales. Those most exploited by black selfconscious writers are worksongs, blues, spirituals (often in characterization, such as Aunt Hagar in Langston Hughes's *Not Without Laughter*), and bad man ballads. Least exploited thus far are conjure and supernatural tales and the folk sermon. However, the style of the folk sermon often shows up in radical poetry and in radical speech—an example of the latter being the combination of street hipster and folk sermon style in the speeches of Malcolm X. Nonetheless, the overall situation means that black writing has still before it the complete absorption of its folk and cultural tradition.

79

This black folk and cultural tradition is still vital, despite the conditions of life confronted in the monstrous American city. Such sophisticated preachers, for example, as the Reverends Jesse Jackson and C. L. Franklin,[1] father of singer Aretha Franklin, know how to move an urban audience through the persisting vitality of folk vibrations, definitions, patterns. The spirituals have become the gospel songs of a class of city-based black churches, and the Br'er Rabbit of the animal tales has become the urban hipster. James Brown, in his dances, singing, and gestures, so popular with black audiences, manages to occupy a spread of transformations of black folk tradition: the blues, the spirituals, the dance, and many of the rituals of the black church. James Brown is a kind of priest, inviting his audience to be unafraid, in terms of their beings and emotions, to go out far and in real deep.

One could go on with respect to music and the dance, since it is now a commonplace that black music long ago outdistanced black literature in rendering the complexity and density of black experience. Those qualified in the area of black music can show how it did the necessary violence to existing Western forms, in order to make black experience come through foremost. However, I must stay with the literature where I feel more articulate.

First, for the selfconscious writer, the great challenge is *not* a simple reproduction of folk forms. For it is neither what some may call quaintness nor the escape from today's constricting social and emotional patterns that must interest the writer. It is, instead, the inner qualities and vibrations of forms of response to existence. Thus the form of response to existence dramatized by the blues is tough and deep self-confrontation; in the spirituals, ecstatic self-confrontation and union with the spirit; in the folk sermon a ritual drama of confrontation with one's space, that of God's, and union with the spirit; in ballads an acknowledgment of a vitality and self bigger than social definitions.

Ralph Ellison, a master of folk and cultural tradition, in an interview appearing in *Harper's Magazine*, March 1967, points out that he reads a folk story with total attention, listening carefully for what it has to tell him.

The full spread of black folk tradition is characterized by an *isness*; a range of responses extending from the sweet to the sour and the cynical; from the tragic to the comic; from the religious

note struck by the spirituals to the obscenity of the dozens, a ritual game involving putting down someone's mama in lurid sexual terms; and the profane language of the lion and the monkey in that raunchy toast entitled "The Signifying Monkey."[2]

In its *is*ness, things simply are—without regard for the neat symmetries Western logic attempts to impose upon existence or the neat compartmentalizations derived from Greek syllogisms and intensified by proximity to Western science and technology. Things (and people) are—are sad, funny, tragic, comic, at separate times, but often also at the same time. In ballads a hard lover hates and loves at the same time, perhaps kills the loved one; in blues a speaker slams the world but also the self; another describes his pitiable condition but also invests the situation with bitter laughter, and so on.

Regarding the folk approach to God, as Professor Charles Long in the Department of the History of Religion, University of Chicago, has pointed out, black religion probably made a good deal of the Hebrew experiences of the Old Testament, not simply because both the Hebrews and blacks were at one time slaves, but because the Hebrews left a record of people facing what the philosophers call *radical contingency* of existence—that is, basic uncertainty at the roots of existence: a universe full of it. Here's good old David, God's anointed—sort of a good, red-blooded, all-Hebrew sort of chap, filled with spiritual and martial success, and then suddenly he's a peeping Tom, taking in the secret contours and places of that young woman's body through that window across the street, then growing hot in his fleshly parts and seeing that her husband is done to a dastardly death. And still there is a place for him in this universe and that of God.[3]

Then there are those wise proverbs—but also Ecclesiastes denying the efficacy of human consciousness. Or the single experiences reported by the spirituals which call for attention to the qualities of existence.

> They crucified my Lord
> And He never said a mumblin word
> Not a word, not a word.[4]

Or:

> You got to walk that lonesome valley,
> you got to walk it for yourself[5]

Or outside religion the Bessie Smith blues saying more directly:

> It's a long old road, but I'm
> gonna find the end (repeated)
> And when I get there, I'm gonna
> shake hands with a friend.
>
> On the side of the road I sat
> underneath the tree (repeated)
> And nobody knows the thoughts that
> came over me.

But alas, when Bessie got to the end she found:

> You can't trust nobody, you might
> as well be alone. (repeated)
> Found my long lost friend, and
> I might as well stayed at home.[6]

Think of the root uncertainty in existence encountered by the slave black girl and her family as expressed in William Faulkner's rhetoric in his novel *Absalom, Absalom!*

> . . . Henry [Sutpen], young, strongblooded, victim of the hard celibacy of riding and hunting to heat and make importunate the blood of a young man, to which he and his kind were forced to pass time away, with girls of his own class interdict and inaccessible and women of the second class [city prostitutes] just as inaccessible because of money and distance, and hence only the slave girls, the housemaids neated and cleaned by white mistresses or perhaps girls with sweating bodies out of the fields themselves and the young man rides up and beckons the watching overseer and says Send me Juno or Missylena or Chlory and then rides on into the trees and dismounts and waits.[7]

And as our field hands' daughter walked into the wood and her parents leaned on the hoe, with one eye on the overseer, to

recognize what was going down, into those Southern pines has come radical contingency, the root uncertainty of existence, and the girl and her parents must deal with it as they are able. And I suggest that we take note of the fact that had our slave girl made it to the big house, as noted by Faulkner, she would not have escaped the same radical contingency, but would merely have confronted it with a more presentable and inviting appearance.

Radical contingency—that openness to the free and unconstrained flow of an unstructured, unfenced-in reality. Folk tradition had to stare at this spectre very hard and then make definitions and codes—both on the interracial level and upon the level of relationships within and between its members. It had to stare and make definitions because of its people's uncertain and ambiguous relationship to all society's institutions, which are, themselves, usually the myths and rituals by which those persons in its central focus escape the boiling heat of chaos.

"Slave early, slave long," says a black retired slave watching the youth enter the field.

"X is good as far as white folks go," explains one sharecropper to another, meaning that X will live up to certain elemental responsibilities, but, in the wider range of human relations, there is a point at which he is overtaken and mastered by his whiteness and special privileges.

"Lawd, Today!" responds another to crushing events, with a variety of meanings. A universe filled with radical contingencies from which are still to be mined the sweets and nobleness of existence.

Perhaps the foregoing is sufficient to suggest that folk and cultural tradition provides a stiff test for the black selfconscious writer who enters its province with the intention of bringing back the fire. The meretricious rather easily reveals itself in the mirror. Thus if we are acquainted with the folk sermons and testimonials we know in which wastebasket to file the much revered *Green Pastures*, and even James Weldon Johnson's use of folk sermons in *God's Trombones* (New York: The Viking Press, 1927), for which he has been justly praised, will make us hesitate between awarding him a B-plus or an A-minus. Between the high ground humanism of Greek-Judeo tradition and black realities stand then

a set of gritty definitions provided by black folk and cultural tradition.

Perhaps it is also apparent that the black writer has several choices. The first can be dealt with briefly. That is, at least in theory, he may choose *not* to come by folk and cultural tradition at all and permit James Joyce and other modernist standouts, here and abroad, to be the sole shapers of his ways of conceiving and rendering dense black realities. However, the fact is that the strongest black writers have, at some time, found themselves involved in profiting by resources of folk tradition: Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. DuBois, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks, William Melvin Kelly, Ronald Fair, Ralph Ellison, LeRoi Jones, Larry Neal, Don L. Lee, Mari Evans and Pauli Marshall, to name offhand something better than a baker's dozen, but by no means to make an exhaustive roll call. It is to be noted that each of the named writers renders through folk and cultural tradition a sense of black realities deeper than the mere rhetorical or sloganeering level, while gaining whatever resources are available from literature in general.

For a somewhat rough-handed critical appreciation, we may recognize, then, three possibilities for the creative writer, so long as we acknowledge that a creative writer's resourcefulness is the real measure of his possibilities. The writer may reduce the flavor, as, say, we might do in trying to force Mom's custard pies into a mass market. He may work very close to the tradition, so that his use of folk forms and insights does not yield fully the complexity of the old vibrations, making terms with new reaches and conditions. Or he may force upon folk forms, definitions, motifs, and myths, as much signification as they can be made to bear. A folk tradition is, after all, alive only to the extent that it is continually recreated in direct contact with reality.

Now I shall move among black writers to illustrate uses made of folk and cultural tradition in each of the listed categories. I will not be bound by rigid adherence to literary chronology, although I begin at the turn of the century when, in poetry, the short story, the novel, and the essay, black literature began to make more independent use of its native artistic resources.

First, the tendency to reduce the flavor of Mom's custard

pies for consumption by a mass audience, as represented by Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Waddell Chesnutt: The term *tendency* is important, since both authors made what they could of a period that recognized black reality mainly in the afterglow of a sentimental plantation tradition as articulated by such white authors as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, which emphasized the good old days of the plantation darky.

Dunbar wrote a variety of poems on nonracial themes, and some involving black personalities, such as his poem on Frederick Douglass, are outside the area of folk dialect and sentiment. Within the sentimental use of the folk, he ranged in his poetry from a close embrace of the standard darky version to mild protest against wrongs of slavery. The extreme of the sentimental tradition is represented by the following lines from the poem, "Chrismus on the Plantation," in which a black spokesman for ex-slaves pledges undying loyalty to an ex-master now fallen upon hard days:

> "Look hyeah, Mastah, I's been servin'
> you' fu' lo! dese many yeahs,
> An' now, sense we's got freedom
> an' you's kind o' po', hit 'pears
> Dat you want us all to leave you
> 'cause you don't t'ink you can pay.
> Ef my membry hasn't fooled me,
> seem dat whut I hyead you say.
>
> "Er in othah wo'ds, you wants us
> to fu'git dat you's been kin',
> An' ez soon as you is he'pless, we's
> to leave you hyeah behin'.
> Well, ef dat's de way dis freedom
> ac's on people, white er black,
> You kin jes' tell Mistah Lincum
> fu' to take his freedom back."[8]

We may compare the Dunbar version with the tough cynicism of the following folk poem by an anonymous slave bard to see how far Dunbar was from encompassing the range of the folk form of response to existence. This one is entitled "Promises of Freedom."

85

My ole Mistiss promise me,
W'en she died, she'd set me free,
She lived so long dat 'er head got bal',
An' she give out'n de notion a-dyin' at all.

My ole Mistiss say to me:
"Sambo, I'se gwine ter set you free."
But w'en dat head git slick an' bal',
De Lawd couldn't a' killed 'er wid a big green maul.

My ole Mistiss never die,
Wid 'er nose all hooked an' skin all dry.
But my ole Miss, she's somehow gone,
An' she lef' Uncle Sambo a'hillin-up co'n.

Ole Mosser lakwise promise me,
W'en he died, he'd set me free.
But ole Mosser go an' make his will
Fer to leave me a-plowin' old Beck still.

Yes, my ole Mosser promise me;
But "his papers" didn' leave me free.
A dose of pizen he'ped 'm along,
May de Devil preach 'is funer'l song.[9]

Margaret Walker's novel on slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction, entitled *Jubilee* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), incorporates the concepts and responses provided by the anonymous poets of folk tradition. Her chief character Vyrie finds her relationship to the slavery and post-Civil War period a very tricky matter. Promised freedom by the man who is both her owner and her father, she finds that his concept of her as useful property prevents any possibility of her freedom—or even marriage to the man of her choice. Her master's widow shows no awareness of such a promise. And other slaves who had received such promises write the whole matter off in cynical laughter. Mrs. Walker refers directly to the folk poem, "Promises of Freedom," and told me, in a recent interview, that she had conceived her novel as a folk novel, that she realized that it had to be a folk novel if it were fully to reflect the black situation and its own definitions of reality.

Or consider a briefer slave comment:

We raise de wheat,
Dey gib us de corn,
We bake de bread,
Dey gib us de crust.
We sif de meal,
Dey gib us huss.
We peel de meat,
Dey gib us de skin.
An dat's de way
Dey take us in.[10]

Now the point is not that Dunbar's people are not genuine because they don't jump bad and cause us to imagine a field full of blacks just about in the mood to shout, "Black Power!" The slave narratives presented in B. A. Botkin's *Lay My Burden Down* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), as a matter of fact, represent a range of sentiments by ex-slaves, some—very mild. The problem here is that most of Dunbar's people seem to be boxed into one area of sentiment, and it is difficult to imagine them rising even temporarily to any other. On the whole they represent, therefore, a short-changing of accumulated insight and wisdom.

Dunbar is different in a few of the poems and short stories. In his one novel to deal extensively with blacks, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), his people, at first merely idyllic figures, move closer in consciousness to the spread of feeling represented by folk and cultural tradition. But their measure of salvation still arrives through a few good while folks back on the old plantation.

Charles Waddell Chesnutt in *The Conjure Woman* (1899), in some of the short stories of the volume *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories* (1899), and in his novels *The Colonel's Dream* (1905), and *The Marrow of Tradition* (1910) sounds a wide range of notes reflected in folk tradition, as one hears them in such collections of folk literature as Thomas W. Talley's *Negro Folk Rhymes, Wise and Otherwise* (1922), Zora Neal Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935), and Langston Hughes' and Arna Bontemps' *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958).[11]

In Chesnutt, one feels an author edging toward a unity between his modernist sensibility and his folk and cultural tradition. If one ignores the plantation framework of *The Conjure Woman*,

87

he encounters fully an ingenious use of simple symbols from black conjure and supernaturalist traditions that convey something of the radical uncertainties of black life and make shrewd attacks upon slavery. The reader feels himself placed within irreducible qualities of black life. His hilarious tale in *The Wife of His Youth*, "The Passing of Grandison," concerning an escaping slave, is in the tradition of the John-fooling-old-massa slave narrative. And his minor black characters in his novels are sometimes reminiscent of the bad niggers of the folk ballad.

In the pre-World War I period, W.E.B. DuBois in such a narrative as "The Coming of John," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1904), and in certain scenes of his novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911) gains strength from folk and cultural tradition.[12]

In Chesnutt and DuBois, we are impressed both by some hints of a tough modernist consciousness and by the fact that the characters seem fully within themselves and mustering their inward forces to meet the uncertainties of existence. Chesnutt's ability to control burlesque, whimsical, and satirical modes of approach give him a further range.

But it is with Jean Toomer's *Cane*, an outstanding work of the 1920s, that we feel a fully modernist consciousness forcing upon the folk stances as much signification as the framework will bear. For in a series of vignettes on southern and northern blacks Toomer is really concerned with the rich vibrations of the inner self caught within the limitations of existence. But here we get ahead of ourselves, and must return to illustrate writers working very close to folk tradition, attempting to assert its genuineness but not necessarily forcing it to mix with very wide vibrations and complexities.

For this purpose certain poems of Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown will do, although others by the same authors would break the bounds of the situation. Langston Hughes is well known for working close to the old blues form in certain poems and reproducing blues attitudes. He is also involved with work songs, gospel songs, and spirituals, and jazz. In the first poem, he perhaps remains too close to the blues form, since he is without the additional resources of the blues singer. The poem is entitled, "Midwinter Blues," and has an urban setting.

88

In the middle of the winter,
Snow all over the ground.
In the middle of the winter,
Snow all over the ground––
'Twas the night befo' Christmas
My good man turned me down.

Don't know's I'd mind his goin'
But he left me when the coal was low.
Don't know's I'd mind his goin'
But he left when the coal was low.
Now, if a man loves a woman
That ain't no time to go.

He told me that he loved me
But he must a been tellin' a lie.
He told me that he loved me.
He must a been tellin' a lie.
But he's the only man I'll
Love till the day I die.

I'm gonna buy me a rose bud
An' plant it at my back door,
Buy me a rose bud,
Plant it at my back door,
So when I'm dead they won't need
No flowers from the store.[13]

I have suggested that Hughes in the "Midwinter Blues" may be working too close to the blues form. That is, that he is too reliant upon a folk form that has, itself, the alliance of the singing voice, instrumental music, facial expression and gesture, to drive itself into our spirit. He perhaps should resort to a greater fusion of the form with other literary resources of the selfconscious writer. If one has heard the poem's kind of experience sung by a real blues shouter, I think that the difference is clearly apparent. Yet the poem, as it stands, has fidelity to folk tradition: the hard wit which is at the same time simple fact; the gritty mixture of much earth and a bit of sky; the sense of the self's involvement and contradictoriness; and the self's despondency and defiance in the last stanza.

89

Hughes gives another blues poem, "Down and Out," an extra dimension by a literary type of repetition of the last line and the emphasis thrown upon the young woman's need for beer, a need that in purely logical terms might seem to be anticlimactic but here makes us create further a sense of the woman's condition.

> Baby, if you love me
> Help me when I'm down and out.
> If you love me, baby,
> Help me when I'm down and out,
> I'm a po' gal
> Nobody gives a damn about.
>
> The credit man's done took ma clothes
> And rent time's nearly here.
> I'd like to buy a straightenin' comb,
> An' I need a dime fo' beer.
>
> I need a dime fo' beer.[14]

Here also is Hughes in the play, *Soul Gone Home*, boldly using an aspect of supernaturalist tradition to render a complex black reality. The reader will find that the comic beginning is a trap, for Hughes is deadly serious. The supernaturalist device adds a dimension to the naturalistic framework of the story.

> *Night.*
> *A tenement room, bare, ugly, dirty. An unshaded electric-light bulb. In the middle of the room a cot on which the body of a NEGRO YOUTH is lying. His hands are folded across his chest. There are pennies on his eyes. He is a soul gone home.*
>
> *As the curtain rises, his MOTHER, a large, middle-aged woman in a red sweater, kneels weeping beside the cot, loudly simulating grief.*
>
> MOTHER Oh, Gawd! Oh, Lawd! Why did you take my son from me? Oh, Gawd, why did you do it? He was all I had! Oh, Lawd, what am I gonna

90

do? (*Looking at the dead boy and stroking his head*) Oh, son! Oh, Ronnie! Oh, my boy, speak to me! Ronnie, say something to me! Son, why don't you talk to your mother? Can't you see she's bowed down in sorrow? Son, speak to me, just a word! Come back from the spirit-world and speak to me! Ronnie, come back from the dead and speak to your mother!

SON (*Lying there dead as a doornail. Speaking loudly*) I wish I wasn't dead, so I *could* speak to you. You been a hell of a mama![15]

Sterling Brown can also work in close fidelity to folk form—this time the work song. First, here is a work song, "Chilly Winds," as sung by an anonymous folk bard. It renders the grittiness of the black chain-gang experience played against the fortitude of the self. The grunts in the work song accompany the blow of an ax or pick.

An' it's oh, Lawdy me
An' it's oh, Lawdy my
Says, I make it where de chilly win' don' blow
If I make it, *hanh!* where de chilly, *hanh!* win' don' blow, *hanh!*

Then it's oh, *hanh!* Lawdy me, *hanh!* an' it's oh, *hanh!* Lawdy my, *hanh!*
Lawd, I'll make it, *hanh!* where de chilly, *hanh!* win' don' blow, *hanh!*

Ol' black gal, *hanh!* you ain' no, *hanh!* mo' mine, *hanh!*
Ol' black gal, *hanh!* you ain' no, *hanh!* mo' mine, *hanh!*
An' it's oh, *hanh!* Lawdy me, *hanh!*
An' it's oh, *hanh!* Lawdy my, *hanh!*
Lawd, I'll make it, *hanh!* where de chilly, *hanh!* win' don' blow, *hanh!*

Captain, Captain, *hanh!* don' be so hard, *hanh!* on long-time man, *hanh!*
Captain, Captain, *hanh!* don' be so hard, *hanh!* on long-time man, *hanh!*

Says, You worked me, *hanh!* in de rain, *hanh!*
An' you worked me, *hanh!* in de snow, *hanh!*
So I, Captain, *hanh!* cain' hard-, *hanh!* -ly go, *hanh!*

An' it's oh, Lawdy me
An' it's oh, Lawdy my
Says, I make it where de chilly win' don' blow.[16]

A close examination of "Chilly Winds" will reveal a very complex arrangement which has much to teach the selfconscious poet, and the lyric renders its experience broadly. It might have applied to any hard-driven prisoner. Sterling Brown's effort is more self-conscious, giving a particularization—an individuality—to the experience that the folk poet avoids. Yet he is faithful to the form and to the strength of the form of response made by the folk to existence. His poem is entitled "Southern Road."

Swing dat hammer—hunh—
Steady, bo';
Swing dat hammer—hunh—
Steady, bo';
Ain't no rush, bebby,
Long ways to go.

Burner tore his—hunh—
Black heart away;
Burner tore his—hunh—
Black heart away;
Got me life, bebby,
An' a day.

Gal's on Fifth Street—hunh—*
Son done gone;
Gal's on Fifth Street—hunh—
Son done gone;
Wife's in de ward, bebby;
Babe's not bo'n.

*"Fifth Street stood for any southern street; really referred to Fifth Street, Lynchburg, Virginia. 'On the street' meant prostitution."—STERLING BROWN

92

My ole man died—hunh—
Cussin' me;
My ole man died—hunh—
Cussin' me;
Ole lady rocks, bebby,
Huh misery.

Doubleshackled—hunh—
Guard behin';
Doubleshackled—hunh—
Guard behin';
Ball an' chain, bebby,
On my min'.

White man tells me—hunh—
Damn yo' soul;
White man tells me—hunh—
Damn yo' soul;
Got no need, bebby,
To be tole.

Chain gang nevah—hunh—
Let me go;
Chain gang nevah—hunh—
Let me go;
Po' los' boy, bebby,
Evahmo' . . . .[17]

Thus we notice that, using basically the same situation as that of "Chilly Winds," Sterling Brown as selfconscious writer individualizes. The prisoner has a specific history: a conviction for murder, a prostitute daughter, an outraged father, a pregnant wife, etc. His worksong form, however, blocks out the entry of obvious sentimentality.

Now we come to the home stretch: the forcing upon the folk form or motif or definition as much signification as it can be made to bear. This approach is difficult to illustrate in a short space, so I shall fall back upon general descriptions of aspects of well known works. In this area, it hardly matters whether the writer has a completely positive attitude toward folk and cultural tradition. As

I have pointed out elsewhere, Richard Wright, in *Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940), used the black religious tradition to underscore his concept of its uselessness to sustain the naked hunger for direct confrontation with life represented by Bigger Thomas.[18] Bigger's mother and the folk preacher make religious gestures that support another folk saying, "Take all this world, but give me Jesus." The gestures provide a dramatic contrast with Bigger's urge to immediate grasp of a mythic heritage of man. In Wright's less well known novel, *The Long Dream* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958), a folk preacher is busy assigning all death and crime to God's agency, while ironically, the main character, Fishbelly, who is present, knows that the crime and death were brought about by his black father in connivance with whites, who then killed the father and now seek the life of Fishbelly.

James Baldwin tends not to be as critical as Wright, but his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), permits only one character, Elizabeth, to find a self-transcending love through the folk version of religion that persists in the city in the form of storefront churches. For others, it is a resource by which to escape the naked terror of existence and evade meaningful identity.

Ralph Ellison, of course, is the complete master of the technique of making folk and cultural tradition bear all kinds of ultimate meanings.[19] Thus he can take the folk character Trueblood and reveal him as a powerful storyteller, and illustrator of the toughness of the folk form of response to existence, and ultimately tie him into Freudian concepts and the classical incest tradition. What I think Ellison shows, although not without raising other critical questions, is that a mastery of complex technical devices enables the writer to make a powerful and vital tool of folk and cultural tradition.

Now what all this leads up to is that the rhythms and vitality of the black folk and cultural tradition provide a deeper sense of black life and literature. They enable us to get beyond the flat confines of sociological description, to move into a blackness much deeper than sloganeering or rhetoric, to gather some of the vitality, density, and complexity that have characterized black life in America. Thus the most radical black writers are finding it a

powerful resource, as indicated by the plays of LeRoi Jones, the poems of Don L. Lee, and others.

I conclude by presenting without further comment a passage from *Invisible Man*, inspired by the Harlem Rebellion of 1943. Ellison is interested in the myth-making capacity of the folk-cultural mind. He is interested in the richness of language—particularly the rhythms and the ingenious metaphors. We may also take note of the *Don Quixote* parody:

> "You think *you* seen something? Hell, you ought to been over on Lenox about two hours ago. You know that stud Ras the Destroyer? Well, man, *he* was spitting blood."
>
> "That crazy guy?"
>
> "Hell, yes, man, he had him a big black hoss and a fur cap and some kind of old lion skin or something over his shoulders and he was raising hell. Goddam if he wasn't a *sight*, riding up and down on this ole hoss, you know, one of the kind that pulls vegetable wagons, and he got him a cowboy saddle and some big spurs."
>
> "Aw naw, man!"
>
> "Hell, yes! Riding up and down the block yelling, 'Destroy 'em! Drive 'em out! Burn 'em out! I, Ras, commands you.' You get that, man, he said, 'I, *Ras*, commands you—to destroy them to the last piece of rotten fish!' An 'bout that time some joker with a big ole Georgia voice sticks his head out the window and yells, 'Ride 'em, cowboy. Give 'em hell and bananas.' And man that crazy sonofabitch up there on that hoss looking like death eating a sandwich, he reaches down and comes up with a forty-five and starts blazing up at that window—And man, talk about cutting out! In a second wasn't nobody left but ole Ras up there on that hoss with that lion skin stretched straight out behind him. Crazy, man. Everybody else trying to git some loot and him and his boys out for blood!"
>
> I lay like a man rescued from drowning, listening, still not sure I was alive.

95

"I was over there," another voice said. "You see him when the mounted police got after his ass?"

"Hell, naw . . . Here, take a li'l taste."

"Well *that's* when you shoulda seen him. When he seen them cops riding up he reached back of his saddle and come up with some kind of old shield."

"A *shield?*"

"Hell, yes! One with a spike in the middle of it. And that ain't all; when he sees the cops he calls to one of his goddam henchmens to hand him up a spear, and a little short guy run out into the street and give him one. You know, one of the kind you see them African guys carrying in the moving pictures . . ."

"Where the hell was you, man?"

"Me? I'm over on the side where some stud done broke in a store and is selling cold beer out the window—Done gone into business, man," the voice laughed. "I was drinking me some Budweiser and digging the doings—when here comes the cops up the street, riding like cowboys, man; and when ole Ras-the-what's-his-name sees 'em he lets out a roar like a lion and rears way back and starts shooting spurs into that hoss's ass fast as nickels falling in the subway at going-home time—and gaawd-dam! that's when you ought to seen him! Say, gimme a taste there, fella.

"Thanks. Here he comes bookety-bookety with that spear stuck out in front of him and that shield on his arm, charging, man. And he's yelling something in African or West Indian or something and he's got his head down low like he knew about that shit too, man; riding like Earle Sande in the fifth at Jamaica. That ole black hoss let out a whinny and got *his* head down—I don't know *where* he got *that* sonofabitch—but, gentlemens, I swear! When he felt that steel in his high behind he came on like Man o' War going to get his ashes hauled! Before the cops knowed what hit 'em Ras is right in the middle of 'em and one cop grabbed for that spear, and ole Ras swung 'round and bust him across the head and the cop goes down and his hoss rears up, and ole Ras rears his

> and tries to spear him another cop, and the other hosses is plunging around and ole Ras tries to spear him still another cop, only he's too close and the hoss is pooting and snorting and pissing and shitting, and they swings around and the cop is swinging his pistol and every time he swings ole Ras throws up his shield with one arm and chops at him with the spear with the other, and man, you could hear that gun striking that ole shield like somebody dropping tire irons out a twelve-story window. And you know what, when ole Ras saw he was too close to spear him a cop he wheeled that hoss around and rode off a bit and did him a quick round-about-face and charged 'em again—out for blood, man! Only this time the cops got tired of that bullshit and one of 'em started shooting. And *that* was the lick! Ole Ras didn't have time to git his gun so he let fly with that spear and you could hear him grunt and say something 'bout that cop's kinfolks and then him and that hoss shot up the street leaping like Heigho, the goddam Silver!"[20]

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98

New Theories of Film and Their Significance for the Seventies

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Can we honestly say that the study, or even the making, of movies has yet achieved respectability? A favorite story of Alfred Hitchock is that of two goats who are devouring cans of a feature film made from a best seller. One of the browsing goats says to the other, "Personally, I prefer the book." S.J. Perelman, himself a major writer for the screen, said creating movie scripts was no worse than playing piano in a call house.

The one full length study of Fitzgerald's screen writing, Aaron Latham's *Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood* (New York: Viking, 1971) suggests by its title and its conclusion that Fitzgerald's Hollywood career existed mainly to prepare him to write the never-completed novel, *The Last Tycoon*. I know of no study of William Faulkner's movie scripts or of his close relation with the director Howard Hawks. In her recent work, *The Citizen Kane Book* (Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1971) Pauline Kael reminds us that Don Mankiewicz, its script writer, created some seventy-two scripts in all, and gave a major part of the late twenties and all of the thirties something of their tone. But Mankiewicz has received no significant critical study.

When I began teaching English some two decades ago my departmental chairman forbade the teaching of movies. And in fact I have come to movies obliquely, by way of linguistics and theory, hoping to achieve respectability, perhaps, by the familiar academic route of incomprehensibility.

And yet I would say that movies today continue to be a living art, in contrast to modern poetry, drama, and other forms of literary crewel work.[1] We must not be misled by attendance figures which show a drop from 70–90 million patrons a week at the end of World War II to the present 15 million a week. Many movies now reach their bulk audiences on TV; a truism of TV is that any first-rate movie will knock down the ratings of all other competing programs. Rough estimates suggest that the American child, before going to college, has watched 18,000 hours of TV (much of it film). In his adult life he will, on the average, watch

TV for one quarter of his existence. A nice irony of this last statistic is that, thanks to the technical nature of film, about one-half the time that you are watching the screen there is nothing there, and so the average American adult will spend one-eighth of his life looking at nothing.

The difficulty of studying movies is in close proportion to their significance—namely, immense. For the film critic and theorist can rarely count on seeing the movie he needs, just when he needs it. And the bulk of film to be covered by historians, though only a fraction has been saved, is still huge. At the Paris Cinemathéque are stored some 50,000 films, 160,000 kilometers in length. These would require 45 years of viewing, at a modest rate of eight hours a day.

Not unnaturally, movie critics are few in number, compared to those for other genres. More often than not—there are admirable exceptions—movie critics, coming as they so often do from training in drama and the novel, are sensitive first of all to the literary content of the film. By this we mean primarily, perhaps, the psychology, the acting, the settings. They tend to downgrade or treat as afterthoughts the visual subtleties of, say Hitchcock's *The Birds*, while stressing its literary genre of science fiction and suspense story.

The history of study of the movies, however, is fortunate in having a small number of theorists who have almost invariably stressed the visual nature of movies. From the past we might note here Vachel Lindsay (1879–1931) and his theory of the filmic hieroglyph, in *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915, rev. 1922; New York: Liveright, 1971). Better known is Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948) for his theory of montage and the relation of film to Japanese *haiku* and to the novels of Dickens, in *Film Form, Film Sense* (New York: Meridian, 1957). From the Hungarian theorist Bela Balazs (1884–1951) we have his last work, *Theory of Film* (London, 1952) which explores not only the poetic possibilities of close-ups and montage, but the symbolical richness of asynchronic sound, that is, sound unrelated to the visual image. A modern example would be the conversations of the call girl with her psychiatrist in *Klute* (1971). The visual shows the call girl with the detective Klute, beginning to fall in love with him, and the voice-over conversation with the psychiatrist, in a Godardian, French New Wave interview, tells us her real state of mind.

From the classical Russian theorists we must mention Vsevelod I. Pudovkin (1893–1953) for his study of filmic space and filmic time, and of camera movement, in *On Film Technique* and *Film Acting* (1929, 1937; New York: Grove Press, 1970). Recently there has been a reprint, with revisions, of Rudolf Arnheim, *Film als Kunst* (*Film as Art*) (1932; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), with its intriguing notion that the art of film is directly linked to the inadequacies of film as a representation of life.[2]

One can still read with profit these and other classical theorists. But those new theories of film which will concern us first come from the French *nouvelle vague*, or New Wave of the late fifties and early sixties,[3] and from the growing interest in France in the linguistics of film, beginning in the middle sixties and still expanding.[4]

The essence of the New Wave was its stress on what Alexandre Astruc has called the art of *la caméra stylo*—the camera as pen. This was to be a cinema freed from the tyranny of the visual—with no verbal subject forbidden. Astruc even argued that if Descartes were living today he would write his *Discourse of Method* with a camera and a roll of 16 mm. film.

Jean-Luc Godard, who began as a film critic and emerged as the most brilliant and innovative of the New Wave film makers, revealed his methods most clearly in the preface and the script of *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things That I Know about Her*) (1966).[5] The strong linguistic bent of his filming is made clear when his heroine, the housewife-prostitute Juliette says, in a close-up, "Le langage, c'est la maison dans laquelle l'homme habite."—*Language is the home in which man lives.*

In his preface Godard has said that this film is a documentary on the Paris region, and at times he presents a series of research questions, during which the film maker continually asks himself what he is doing. At first the goal of this highly verbal film may seem to be what it says it is, the recording, in TV fashion, of the kinds of prostitution that flourish in all levels of Parisian society. But beyond that verbal idea are a succession of startling, even beautiful filmic images, of the mutations of Paris, the feminine subject of the title. So much so that we begin to realize it is no accident that in the last four or five years Godard has associated himself with the Dziga Vertov Group, named for the Russian theorist and formalist of the

kino-eye.[6] This blend of *kino-eye* and *caméra stylo* is what sets the New Wave apart, far more so than their superficially new language of jump cuts, hand-held camera shots, natural lighting, freeze framing, slow motion and the rest. That is, Godard has enlarged the verbal, the linguistic range of film, without diminishing its visual strengths.

In time of origin, and even perhaps in temperament, the new wave, if we may call it that, of linguistic film criticism has had a close association of tone and milieu with the new wave of film makers such as Godard. No doubt speculations on the "language" of movies are almost as old as movies themselves, but current linguistic analysis, with its interest in narrativity, in denotation, in connotation, is far more linguistically precise and far less loosely metaphorical in its use of the term.

Increasingly linguists, and even some sociologists or sociolinguists, are beginning to claim that culture itself is a kind of language, or to use a fast developing term, a kind of code.[7] Not only art, as Peter Wollen has argued, but perhaps all culture then, may be best defined in the next few decades as part of a theory of semiology.[8]

But, following the cautions of Christian Metz, we must make comparisons of verbal language and filmic language with some prudence. Camera shots are infinite in number, but the words of English or Swahili are not. The film maker invents his camera shots, but even a Shakespeare invents very few words. Camera shots give a viewer an indefinite amount of information, say, about the massacre on the Odessa steps in *Potemkin*, but even the phrase "beauty is truth, truth beauty" does not.

Again, a camera shot, unlike a word, but like a sentence, is an actualized unity: it integrates a section of actuality. However, a camera shot in only a weak and perhaps unusual sense takes part of its meaning from its paradigmatic opposition to other shots. In other words, the adjective "black" has its own paradigmatic slot to fill, which no verb can occupy, but an alternating camera shot does not rule out replacement, in that slot, by a descriptive camera shot. A word is always part of an organized semantic field, but a high angle shot may have one meaning in F.W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* and another meaning in Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons*. In short, even though a shot may be more like a

sentence than a word, it is still, in many ways, not like a sentence.

A great service performed by the linguist Christian Metz has been to analyze some eight autonomous segments as the basic denotative units or denotative code of movies:[9]

1. The parallel syntagma (*syntagme parallèle*): an autonomous segment which weaves different motifs together, but without any sharp links of place or time, in what may even at times take the form of antithesis. In the ending of D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), the rapidly intercut stories of Christ, of the execution of a contemporary criminal, of the Huguenot massacres in France, and of the fall of Babylon are an extended syntagma of this kind. The alternate shots of the lives of rich and poor in G.W. Pabst's *Joyless Street* (1925) form a more common example.
2. Bracketed syntagma (*syntagme en accolade*): an autonomous segment, without chronological sequence, even perhaps resembling a stream of consciousness form, in which short scenettes together produce a meaningful whole. The initial erotic sketches of Godard's *Une femme mariée* (1964) are of this type, a camera pen sketch of modern love. A major contrast to parallel syntagma is that there is no systematic alternation or contrast of shots. The familiar balloon or high crane shots of the Babylon festival crowd in *Intolerance* are of this type.
3. Descriptive syntagma (*syntagme descriptif*): an autonomous segment, which hangs together chronologically, often with simultaneity of time and place. Here we may group those familiar panning and helicopter shots which describe a landscape. Such a syntagma introduces us to the Broadway hotel setting of *Double Whoopee* (discussed in detail below).
4. Alternating syntagma (*syntagme alterné*): This familiar type of shot, one of the earliest variants on the pure scene, often has the denotative meaning of pursued and pursuers. First, as in John Ford's *Stage-*

105

coach, a shot of the pursuing Indians, then a cut to the fleeing stagecoach, and again, until the meaning of the shots as a syntagma is clear. These alternating shots signify simultaneity of event. That we have learned such syntagmas is clear when we show one to audiences who have never before seen films; they are baffled by it and do not understand it. This syntagma often occurs in gangster, spy, and horror movies, as well as in westerns.

5. Scene (*scène*): a chronological narrative, without omissions comparable to a scene in a theatrical play. There is one significant difference from stage practice, in that the camera may focus on the person speaking, or watch (from the point of view of the speaker) the person being spoken to—indeed the camera may freely shift back and forth. The earliest movies consisted almost entirely of *scenes*, often with the camera instinctively located in about the imaginary fifth row center of a theatre, and not allowed to move.
6. Episodic sequence (*séquence par episodes*): this term refers to an interrupted but temporal sequence, whose shots constitute a unity, and in fact can only be understood together. In Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) the less and less affectionate breakfasts of Kane and his wife are shown, from the beginning of their marriage, until she ends contemptuously reading Kane's rival newspaper.
7. Ordinary sequence (*séquence ordinaire*): a sequence which omits trivia, but deals with a single unit of time. Dull or unnecessary sections within the sequence are omitted. In *American Aristocracy* (1917) Douglas Fairbanks swims from his seaplane to the ship, knocks out hostile crew members and goes to the rescue. The actual time of these events is much longer than the filmic time, and so here we can see clearly the ability of movie language to compress the passage of time, in order to speed up the narrative. Here again is a kind of shot which is very difficult for audiences who have never seen film.

8. The autonomous shot (*le plan autonome*): a brief autonomous segment which has its own independence: comparable to a sentence in writing which for stylistic or other reasons has to do duty as a paragraph. Godard's love of written words in his films, for example the lettering, *"introduction à l'ethnologie"* in *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* is an instance. Or we might imagine, after the establishment of an alternating syntagma of Indians pursuing a stagecoach, an occasional autonomous shot of just the fleeing stagecoach, perhaps as a memory flashback.

We may then view the denotative filmic code as made up in part of these autonomous segments, presented in linear fashion. Next we must imagine a whole connotative series of cultural and specialized codes intersecting with the denotative code as the film progresses. Here we may hypothesize that metaphor often, perhaps invariably, acts as a shifter, to link the connotative codes to the denotative code or codes.

In *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) there is a well-known *scene* (number 5 above) in which Esmerelda, the beautiful heroine, offers Lon Chaney, the hunchback, some water from a fountain. On the denotative level the action consists of a plea for water which the girl satisfies. On the connotative level we can see the fairy tale code of beauty and the beast. We have further what Roland Barthes has called the heuristic code, that is, the postponement or mystification of action (an important part of suspense), for at first the girl does not offer water to the hunchback. We can see a moral code, that one should for humane reasons satisfy the genuine needs of others.

All these codes are, as it were, shifted back and forth by the familiar metaphor of satisfying one's thirst. An amusing example from Hitchcock's *I Confess* is provided by the judge, Brian Aherne, who first balances a knife and a fork on a glass, and next balances a glass of water on his head as he lies on the floor, thus suggesting not only the specialized code of parlor games, but the code of justice.

The movie *Z* (*ou l'anatomie d'un assassinat politique*) (1969)

10-7

of Costa-Gavras is unusually rich in its intersections of codes. During the action of the assassination, it is possible to trace the denotative code of a *descriptive syntagma* of the threatening crowd, an *ordinary sequence* during which the assassination takes place, an *alternating syntagma* during part of the pursuit of the assassins, and a *scene* during which the driver of the murder car is arrested. Among the connotative codes which intersect are these: the Greek cultural code of *philotimo* or self respect; the genre code of the detective movie; the political code of capitalism-anticapitalism; the sexual code of pederasty, linked to fascism.[10]

Sometimes one code may stand for another. In Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919) when Richard Barthelmess as a Chinese woos the white heroine, Lillian Gish, we can sense that this interracial affair substitutes for a forbidden theme in the America of that time, that of the black male suitor of a white girl. Or the techniques of one genre code may be adapted into another genre code. Chaplin's comic two-reelers, such as *Easy Street* (1917) show a strong influence from the genre code of the comic strip.[11]

My own tentative and rough grouping of codes might be of this sort: (1) *cultural codes*—these are natural, are not learned in school or by apprenticeship, and are often iconographic. As well as obvious cultural concepts such as Greek *philotimo*, these codes can include dress, behavior, food. (2) *specialized codes*—for these some apprenticeship is necessary. These might include denotative and technical filmic codes, and genre codes such as the detective film or novel and the comic strip. It is easy to demonstrate that audiences not used to such codes find them often incomprehensible at first. (3) *referential codes*—as an example, Roland Barthes cites proverbial wisdom. My guess is that a good deal of the unrecognized, hidden appeal of western movies is from their incorporation of more than the usual references to the proverbial wisdom code.

Though we cannot here examine in all its detail even a short two-reeler such as the Laurel and Hardy film, *Double Whoopee* (1929) we can make some abridged suggestions as to how linguistic analysis of film does reveal new insights about the structure and aesthetics of this apparently simple comedy.

Double Whoopee begins with a *descriptive syntagma* of a high shot of Broadway, then a shot, in a strangely expressionistic lighting,

of the hotel entrance from across the street, and a shot of the hotel lobby. A title advises us: "The hotel lobby buzzed with excitement—*The Prince was coming.*" But in fact the very next shot is a continuation of the shot before the title, and shows no special excitement—it is a variant of the Kuleshov effect, in which an emotion is read into the film by the spectator, through the montage, or juxtaposition of shots (here by the juxtaposition of a title and a shot.)[12]

There follows a *bracketed syntagma*, sometimes called a reaction shot when it shows the reaction of the actors, here to the coming of the Prince.

The third autonomous denotative segment of the film is a *scene* rich in connotative coding. The Prince steps out of a car with a conspicuous coat of arms on to a floor cushion. He wears a monocle and a Prussian officer's uniform and carries a swagger stick. He uses his aide's hand as a human ashtray. Then his valet-minister brushes him off. On strolls Stan Laurel, blocking our view of the Prince. And Oliver Hardy, who looks back at the Prince in some disdain. If the Prince stands for German militarism, for aristocracy, Laurel and Hardy stand for democratic comedy. We are getting a hint of the dominant metaphor or shifter, that clothes make the man. And Hardy's flap of his cape, as if to wipe out temporarily the uniform coat of the Prince, suggests that the comic genre code is about to start.

The fourth autonomous segment is an *ordinary sequence*, in which Laurel and Hardy are mistaken for the Prince and his minister, and try to register at the hotel. Here the camera often takes the subjective view of Laurel, and even when it is viewing him objectively, it seems to sympathize with him more than with Hardy. This ordinary sequence includes a reaction shot of the hotel guests, and much splattering of ink blots, along with the unconscious and inadvertent use of ink on her face by one of the guests. Then the hotel manager learns that Laurel and Hardy are the new doorman and footman, and not the Prince and his minister, and they are sent off to put on their uniforms.

Much of the camera work so far has been done by mid-shots or two shots (the so-called American shot, of head to knees, of which American movies are supposed to be almost excessively fond). In the fifth autonomous segment, an *ordinary sequence*, we get a full shot (head to feet) of the Prince making his entrance into the lobby.

The Prince then walks to the elevator (note that we see the beginning of his walk, and his arrival at the elevator door, but not the middle of the walk and so we have a contraction of real time into a more compressed filmic time).

The Prince is asked for a speech, steps out of the elevator to give it, and we see intercut a big close-up of a finger (by its panache pretty clearly that of Hardy) summoning the elevator to another floor. The Prince says, "And I am here to make what you Americans call—whoopee," and falls into the elevator shaft in a cheat shot. That is, we see the beginning of his fall, and the end of it, and assume the middle has taken place.

Before the Prince can be rescued, Hardy descends in the automatic elevator, marking the beginning of the fifth autonomous segment. Only the end of the Prince's rescue is shown in this *ordinary sequence*. His uniform is covered with grease, a contrast to the new uniform of Hardy. His minister-valet attempts to brush him off, but is rejected. And the Prince makes a highly undemocratic remark: "This would mean death in my country!" He is at once punished by a second fall into the shaft, when Laurel descends in a repeat of the comic scene with Hardy.

The shifter here is a metaphor of the type, pride takes a fall, from the referential code of proverbial wisdom. And the militaristic and aristocratic code has been vanquished by the democratic code in the persons of Laurel and Hardy, as menial workers who literally descend on the Prince.

The sixth autonomous segment, a *scene* of Hardy as doorman, a return to the expressionistic lighting of the hotel entrance, alerts us to the fact this film is a parody of Murnau's experssionistic film, *Der letzte Mann* (1925), *The Last Laugh*: Hardy's role is a parody of Emil Jannings as doorman.

A seventh autonomous segment, a *scene*, has Laurel, inside the lobby, strip off the dress shirt of a hotel guest—the first of several unmasking or unclothing metaphors which will tie together an underlying meaning of the film from now on.

The eighth segment, an *ordinary sequence*, enables us to see that for the comic code of parody, you need a doorman *and* a footman, and twin entrances. In a beautifully staged quarrel over tips, Laurel enlists the aid of a policeman against Hardy. Here the camera

710

work goes from mid-shots to two shots to close-ups—the last especially for Laurel's emotion at the loss of his tip.

The ninth segment, a *scene*, shows a fight between the taxi driver, the cop and Laurel and Hardy, with a symbolic stripping of part of the doorman's uniform of Hardy. This reminds us of Emil Jannings's loss of his uniform in *The Last Laugh*.

The tenth segment, a *scene*, shows the arrival of Jean Harlow, in a taxi. Hardy, disregarding his status as doorman, democratically acts more as her escort than as a servant, and the taxi drives off, having stripped her of most of her evening dress. Metaphorically, she is now closer to the level of Laurel and Hardy. Next Hardy strips off Laurel's uniform to cover Jean Harlow. Both Laurel and Hardy have now lost major parts of their servant uniforms.

In a new *scene*, the eleventh segment, Laurel and Hardy begin one of their well-known eyepoking fights. The manager, an assistant, a third assistant, a hotel guest (the one previously stripped of his shirt), the taxi driver and the cop are all involved in this ballet-fight. And the Prince, coming down the stairs, is splattered with a tray of food.

We begin the twelfth segment, an *ordinary sequence*, in which the Prince resplatters his minister, and goes back to the elevator, saying, "The King shall hear of this!" Again a close-up of a finger summoning the elevator. The Prince goes on, "And I'll tell the Queen, too!" Once again he tumbles into the elevator shaft, once again his uniform is badly soiled. This time, Laurel and Hardy, back in their civilian clothes, descend on top of the fallen Prince. It is the message of *Sartor Resartus*—clothes make the man—and the triumphant democrat.

Though the New Wave school of movies is no more, the linguistic criticism which is linked to its films and to its *auteur* or director-as-author theory is still growing. For filmic language, unlike verbal language, can change with each film, and we often learn to read filmic language as we watch or re-watch a particular film—in contrast to the way we learn verbal language. New theories of film then may well be new languages of film.

At present, the avant garde in film is unusually active. Perhaps Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Trans-Europe Express* will serve as an amusing example. It is a story of an apprentice drug smuggler. The

111

editors of this story discuss it as it happens, criticize, and change it. Their film includes repeated or loop shots, tilted camera shots, fantasy shots, flicker shots, outrageous violence and sex. We should perhaps remember Bela Balazs' argument that the avant garde is one of the means by which the bourgeois conscience avoids reality.

Especially in America, many young film makers have experimented with short avant garde films of various types. These have revived the one- and the two-reelers with which movies began; often such films, at least the more poetic ones, are like the longer poems of the Romantic Period. Perhaps Stan Brakhage, with his well known remark, "I would say I grew very quickly as a film artist once I got rid of drama as a prime source of inspiration," can stand for many others we would like to review here.[13] He is still best known for *Dog Star Mountain Man*, a four-season, four-part mythopoeic mountain climb, with dazzling film inserts and anamorphic lens shots.

One of the first to work on computer-made films was John Whitney. His *Permutations* (1968), early though it is, still remains one of the best works of this kind, a succession of patterns and colors, married to non-computerized jazz.

So-called structural film stresses the shape of the whole film and downgrades content. Perhaps some of the best known films are those of Andy Warhol, such as *Sleep* (1963), some six hours of an actor sleeping. Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) is one of the more exasperating and more interesting of these films. By using a zoom lens, we keep photographing (ever zooming in) a far wall of a room. Among other events or non-events, a man staggers to the floor out of camera range, a girl telephones that there is a dead man, and then she leaves, and the camera steadily zooms across the room, ending on a picture, a final quiet image of the sea and waves.

New black movies have so far been in more conventional forms and have had a strong trace of documentary and protest filmic types. The most successful of these has been Melvin Van Peebles's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), the story of a black who starts as helper in a black brothel, and ends as a black revolutionary escaping to Mexico.[14] This film rejoices in a striking use of black language, black protest and a completely black point of view.

Science fiction movies showed a marked change in the 1950s and 1960s, when monster-horror movies married science fiction movies. One can indulge in uncomfortable speculations as to why,

in so many of these flics, the only recourse of a helpless citizenry is to call on the military, and why, in so many, it is only the government that can fight against giant ants, body snatchers, triffids, and "them." But Stanley Kubrick's *2001* can serve as an example of the better of these films, so far in advance of the older segments of its audience that the viewer who understood it best was only fifteen years old. Essentially the space ship of *2001* is a flying Gothic castle, with its interior Freudian spaces and tunnels, and its resident demon, a computer named HAL, quite comparable to Frankenstein's monster, created by man, and able to destroy him. There is a characteristic amount of Gothic violence—two apes, one zebra, many tapirs, three astronauts, one HAL computer, the astronaut Poole, and Bowman, unless we count his rebirth.[15]

The French New Wave had strong links with what is sometimes called *cinéma vérité* and with documentaries of a drifting unorganized kind, far different from Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* in which he sawed an igloo in half in order to photograph its inhabitants more realistically. *You Are On Indian Land* (National Film Board of Canada, 1969) by George Stoney and Noel Starblanket, films a confrontation between Indians and the Canadian police on Cornwall Island, December 18, 1968, in which the Indians protested against white violations of Indian treaties. Among other incidents, the Indian council chief is criticized for being a white sellout, and tries to get the jack out of his car to hit his fellow Indians. It's clear that Indians, police, and Canadian motorists are all very aware that they are being filmed, and are even at times reacting as much to the film makers as to the event. That is, people are now so used to being filmed during any confrontation *that part of the action is the filming itself*. Perhaps any documentary from now on will include this shading of the filmic code, this sense of being "on."

The last of the new theories of film I want to discuss is the new theory of the western.[16] One part of this new theory explores the iconography of the western, and its origin. Here we must concentrate on four features of that iconography: the street duel, the night killing by a mob, weak law enforcement (and sheriffs), tolerance of murder. It is beginning to be fairly well established that both the imaginative and the real practices of today's western, and especially these four, took their origin in the South. New sociological

investigations suggest that different violence rates in the United States correlate very well with the amount of "southernness" in the regions of America. If we subtract for this quality in various ways, we then arrive at a homicide figure for the United States which is not very different from that of Canada. In other words, it is the southern element—now called the western or frontier element—in American culture which accounts for its high comparative rate of violence.[17] The American western movie then, in its origin and ethos, as well as in its images, is an essentially southern form, and can best be understood by a southern regional approach.

But not only do we have a new theory of the western, we have strikingly different westerns. If we think back to the 400 or so westerns made in the twenties by Tom Mix (who, by the way directed the original *Ben Hur* chariot race) we recall *Just Tony*, in which the wonder horse complains about the heroine by saying, "A woman! More trouble." Its ending requires that the hero kiss the horse as well as the heroine. In these movies blacks are comic figures and Mexicans are villains. What a change from John Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge* (1959) in which the hero is a black soldier falsely accused of rape of a white girl and which deals quite frankly with the issue of black and white sexual jealousy, all in the setting of the usual western iconography. Somewhat like *Just Tony*, Monte Hellman's *The Shooting* (1965) starts from a close-up of a horse, but although like all westerns it stresses the alternating syntagma in its pursuit sequences, these are slow, at times even in slow motion and stop action shots, a far cry from the western influenced chariot race of *Ben Hur*, or the Tom Mix stagecoach race film on which that was based. And the involved, Cain-and-Abel conflict of *The Shooting* goes far beyond the simplicities of the usual Tom Mix western.

It is appropriate to end with the western. Perhaps even more than other genres of film, it shows what movies can be like at their best and at their worst. The movies, and theories about movies, are in a comparatively young stage still. Probably few intellectuals take westerns very seriously, and yet some of John Ford's more recent westerns not only show the ability of the movies to expand or contract real time, to make up a new reality out of a succession of shots from different camera points of view, and to give an illusion of life and action that is—when at its best—more satisfying than life itself. But these movies also show a psychological, and, even better, a meta-

phorical and visual subtlety that deserves, even demands, more sophisticated analysis than it has received.

With the new scholarship and the new theories of movies has come a growing interest in showings of older and unusual movies, and in scripts of movies as well. Hitchcock once said, "Some films are slices of life. Mine are slices of cake."[18] The riddle of this real unreality called film remains. If the linguistic theories of film have any validity, their stress on the value of shifters, of metaphors as the means of linkage among intersecting codes, would further imply that this infant art is preserving, even nurturing, what may be the imaginative and visual core of the life of our times.

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1. Though I welcome controversy on this subject, I refer readers to Alan Gowans, *The Unchanging Arts* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1971), Chapter III, "Arts Living and Dead," pp. 20–54.
2. For surveys of film theory the reader may wish to consult the following: Richard Dyer MacCann, *Film, A Montage of Theories* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1966); Marcel Martin, *Le Langage cinématographique* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1968); André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* 4 vols. (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1958)—selections are being published by the University of California, as *What Is Cinema?*, vol. I, 1968, vol. II, 1972); Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, 1965). See also Andrew Sarris, *Interviews with Film Directors* (New York: Avon Books, 1970).
3. Of the some 170 directors active in the New Wave from 1959 through 1963, Claude Chabrol (1930–), François Truffaut (1932–), Jacques Rivette (1928–), Eric Rohmer (1923–) and Jean-Luc Godard (1930–) are perhaps the best known. Their views first found critical expression from 1951 on in the magazine, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, edited by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Eric Rohmer.
4. A number of articles bearing on this subject in whole or in part, by Christian Metz, Roland Barthes and others have appeared in *Communications*: see especially volume 8 (1966), titled *L'Analyse structurale du récit*, and volume 15 (1970), *L'Analyse des images*: there is an interesting critique in *Cinéthique*, volumes 7–8 (1970). Some of the positions of this linguistic criticism are reflected in Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (2d ed., London: Thames and Hudson, 1970). Notable recent works of this type in French are: Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au Cinéma* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1968), and his *Langage et cinéma* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1971); a third volume by Metz is in preparation; Michael Henry, *Le Cinéma expressioniste allemand: un langage métaphorique* (Paris: Editions du signe, 1971); Marie-Clair Ropars-Wuilleumier, *De la littérature au cinéma, genèse d'une écriture* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1970).
5. First published in *L'Avant Scène du cinéma, 70* (May 1967); the preface was reprinted in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1968), pp. 391–393.

115

6. Christoph Giercke, "Dziga Vertov," *Afterimage, 1* (April 1970), n.p.; Jean-Luc Godard, "British Sounds," and "Pravda," same issue; see also Georges Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov* (Paris: Editions champs libre, 1971).
7. For the growing use of the term "code" see Georges Mounin, "La notion de code en linguistique," *Le Sens commun* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1970), pp. 77–86; Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1970), pp. 266–268.
8. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 17.
9. See Metz, *Essais*, pp. 125–133.
10. *L'Avant Scène du cinéma*, No. 96 (October 1969), 30–31. For an analysis of cultural codes and specialized codes, see Metz, *Essais*, p. 114. A somewhat different classification is to be found in Barthes, *S/Z*.
11. Alan Gowans, *The Unchanging Arts* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1971), pp. 258ff.
12. "Kuleshov and I made an interesting experiment. We took from some film or other several close-ups of the well-known Russian actor Mosjukhin. We chose close-ups which were static and which did not express any feeling at all—quiet close-ups. We joined these close-ups, which were all similar, with other bits of film in three different combinations. In the first combination the close-up of Mosjukhin was immediately followed by a shot of a plate of soup standing on a table. It was obvious and certain that Mosjukhin was looking at this soup. In the second combination the face of Mosjukhin was joined to shots showing a coffin in which lay a dead woman. In the third the close-up was followed by a shot of a little girl playing with a funny toy bear. When we showed the three combinations to an audience which had not been let into the secret the result was terrific. The public raved about the acting of the artist. They pointed out the heavy pensiveness of his mood over the forgotten soup, were touched and moved by the deep sorrow with which he looked on the dead woman, and admired the light happy smile with which he surveyed the girl at play. But we knew that in all three cases the face was exactly the same." Vsevelod I. Pudovkin, *On Film Technique* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p. 168.
13. A number of these new film makers are discussed in P. Adams Sitney, *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1970) and G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971). Edward Pincus, one of these new filmmakers, has written an excellent inexpensive text: *Guide to Filmmaking* (New York: New American Library/Signet, 1969).
14. The text has been printed (New York: Lancer Books, 1971); an interview with Van Peebles is Horace W. Coleman, "Melvin Van Peebles," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 2 (1971), 368–384.
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Johnny Is Neither Eager Nor Easy to Please

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Miriam Goldstein Sargon

I don't think I'm leaking classified information or violating professional ethics when I say that most of us English teachers today lead "lives of quiet desperation." And like Thoreau,

> I do not mean to prescribe rules to strong and valiant natures, who will mind their own affairs whether in heaven or hell . . . nor to those who find their encouragement and inspiration in the present condition of things, and cherish it with the fondness and enthusiasm of lovers,—and, to some extent, I reckon myself in this number: I do not speak to those who are well employed in whatever circumstances . . . but mainly to the mass of [English teachers] who are discontented, and idly complaining of the hardness of their lot or of the times, when they might improve them. . . .[1]

For most of us English teachers today find ourselves confronted with a new breed of students with modes of learning undreamed of in the education courses that licensed us to teach, and with content never included in the English courses that qualified us in our subject. Yet between affective education and the scramble for English electives, some of us may surmount our pasts precisely because Johnny is neither eager nor easy to please.

No, English is not what it used to be—a careful dose of each of the three magic ingredients: Language, Literature, and Composition. Yet what was so sacred about that trinity, which came not from Mt. Sinai, not even from Mt. Olympus, but from a nineteenth-century American splice when English became a required course for college-bound students. Then, as all kinds of students entered our schools, the blessings of the trinity were extended to the less fortunate. But today the children themselves are doing the unsplicing! In an age of scientific and subsequent social change, in an age when traditional learning and traditional courses of study make sense only for the fearful, be they bold or compliant, new questions arise—even about the teaching of English. This time the answers are coming

not from the top, the college English teacher, but from the bottom: the young learner.

The pupils are writing their own catechism. They question by coming to us with a nothing-sacred attitude toward school and the rest of the establishment. They are bold and scared, naive and sophisticated. They will not be deceived. They want to respect themselves and us as persons. When they're puzzled or bored or resentful, they tell us—right away. The education we offer such youngsters has to make instant sense or they reject it—except for the quiet, complacent, or cunning ones, who if they learn, learn in spite of us, not because of us.

Although we want to help with the answers, we find them hard to come by—for the same reasons that the questions are easy to come by. The scientific and social revolution of our time, the explosion in so many different disciplines, leaves each of us barely able to keep up with advances in our own subject, let alone those so far removed as chemistry or economics or psychology. Forced to choose quickly between affective education and our own subject, some of us have understandably turned to the children, in some cases with messianic joy, in others with middle-aged fear, in most cases with predictable failure. And so we live in quiet desperation. Some of us. But not all of us. This new generation of school children, through their honest if unsettling rejection of traditional English, has assured our continuing education. Who of us can afford NOT to reconsider what we teach and what they learn?

Meanwhile the students have asked for and got open classrooms, heterogeneous grouping, nongraded electives, independent study, small seminars, open campus, work study, schools without walls. You name it; they've got it. But if what they have got is a new way to learn old, discredited subject matter, then we are in desperate circumstances. If heterogeneous grouping only means less prepared pupils who are going their traditional ways, merely fulfilling requirements for the next step upward, all we have achieved is leveling. Such sad waste of the various tastes, backgrounds, levels of emotional and educational maturity, when what could have enriched learning, subject matter that is vital to all the group, is lacking!

So we must look carefully at our electives. In Massachusetts, where I teach, over sixty per cent of the English departments are offering electives this year. Probably it will be closer to 100 per cent next year. According to our state department of education's computerized list, thousands of pupils are now taking courses or units in English language, history, dialectology, lexicography, grammar, etc. These electives are encouraging because they say to the pupil: "Now you can choose what you want to learn." And they say to the teacher: "Now you can choose what you want to teach." We need only take a hard look at what we are teaching, what we have to teach, and what we want to teach.

One of the most popular electives is Theater Arts, sometimes a euphemism for gym or group therapy, but usually the liveliest environment for learning English—if English may still involve talking, reading, interpreting, sharing language, and educating the imagination. Another popular elective is Mechanics of Writing: often heavily laced with classroom prescriptive grammar, but sometimes providing another lively environment for learning English—if English may still involve motive for writing, as well as the elements J. Stephen Sherwin names: "Selective criticism, discussion, practical explanation, and revision."[2] If the Theater Arts teacher has had a major or minor in her subject or has taken a few drama courses and has boned up on Viola Spolin's text,[3] then contemporary drama on TV, on film, in books, and in live theater can't help providing rich substance for the course. What can we say of Mechanics of Writing? Is it taught by a teacher who wouldn't be caught dead with creative writing? How recently has he taken a rigorous course in language or writing or examined some of the texts reflecting contemporary linguistic knowledge? How flexible is he? Or is he coasting along on E.B. White's *Elements of Style*, new edition, if you please?

Too often the Mechanics of Writing elective, sincerely chosen by the student who wants to write as an educated, alive person, turns out to be old wine in old bottles: musty handbooks for the thirties or forties, thanks to our storage rooms. Or it is old wine in new bottles: those gorgeous, gaudy new texts that still are peddling the old *do's* and *dont's* without any reason. It is sad to see the student who has been raising courageous questions about Vietnam or the ghettos or pollution settle for such simplistic and often baseless

"answers" in the name of mechanics of writing. To see him correcting dangling participles, or choosing between *who* and *whom*, or toiling with the not-to-be-split infinitive. Even the College Board examiners couldn't care less, not simply because these niceties are no longer observed by educated users of English, but because they never were—outside the classroom. Not all the parsing, diagramming, memorizing of parts of speech can save our student. The chances are they are based on a description of English sentences that cannot stand the test of English sentences—outside the drill book. That's what we mean by a totally discredited description.

Even if the description were valid—if the analysis could be applied to any sentence in the living language rather than to the textbook sentences alone, there's no transfer of such knowledge to linguistic performance, to the way we speak and write. Why should there be? As Mark Lester says, "Our ability to use language is not dependent on the study of grammar any more than our ability to see is dependent on the study of visual perception."[4] On the other hand, any language environment—the lunch room, the math class, the gym—will improve our pupils' English if that environment is honest and stimulating. Just as any class will cause tongue rot and pen leak if the environment is dead or phony.

That's why we need to look to our language programs, to see what we can reasonably salvage, what we must, no matter how reluctantly, discard, not by specious tests of faith or tradition or relevance, but by tests of intellectual integrity. The first wave of English electives is almost over. The youngsters are discovering the difference between Mickey Mouse courses and those with substance. They take the Mickey Mouse courses, some of them. But that's when they're playing games. Sooner or later they respond to solid substance.

And that's what the new grammar is. It's solid and it's real. It's solid because it deals with that which is as close to each of us as our skins, our own language, our own voice, our own handwriting. And it's real because it describes what we know when we know a language: how we learn a limited number of rules for putting together sentences; and how, once we know those rules, there's no stopping us the rest of our lives. Sure we'll pick up new words as we go along. That's education. And sure we'll

learn when it's O.K. to use some of them words and when it's better to use others of those words. That's education, too.

The new grammar is solid and it's real and it's very much alive. It's young, most of it going back to the 1950s for a start. But it addresses itself to the basic, time-honored questions any curious human being might ask: What is language? How does a person learn it? Why do we all speak differently? How do we know that a sentence is well-formed? And there are no final answers, only better theories, constantly being refined, as in any other form of human knowledge. The linguist, like the mathematician or the physicist, makes no claim to knowing all there is to know about his subject. His only claim is that he is pushing ignorance a little more into the past and knowledge a little more into the present and adding a few nagging questions for the future to deal with. Whatever these sciences teach us can only involve us in new and more probing questions. The new grammar, in other words, opens doors for the student, instead of closing them.

How do we know, for example, that *you* is understood in a sentence like *Come here?* Your old classroom teacher will say, "*You* is understood. Any idiot knows THAT!" And she's not far off. Any native speaker intuitively knows that *you* is the understood subject. But that's what science is always doing: explaining things that the rest of us know but take for granted because we can't explain or account for what we know.

We all know that at least on this planet things fall down, not up. But why they fall down has intrigued thinkers from Ptolemy through Copernicus and Galileo and Newton and Einstein and our astrophysicists today. We all know that we can identify colors and that some people are color-blind. But how and why we know or don't know colors is still baffling men of science. So the answer, "*You* is understood," may satisfy some pupils. But there are always those, thank heaven, who want to know, "Why?" "How?" And we have more and more of those questioners in our classrooms today.

Here's how today's youngsters figure out the *why* and the *how*. Instead of reading or memorizing or correcting sentences, they create their own. They experiment with sentences. They list all kinds, some very much like the given one: *Help. Dig that. Follow*

me. Help me. Help yourself. Soon they'll tell you that you can say:

	I help myself.	We help ourselves.
	You help yourself.	You help yourselves.
	He helps himself.	They help themselves.
But not	*I help yourself. *or*	*Help myself.
	*You help himself.	*Help themselves., *etc.*
	*He helps myself.	

They realize very quickly that the given sentence follows the rules for forming their other acceptable sentences: that like every other English sentence, *Come here* consisted of a subject and a predicate; that the subject, *you*, must have been deleted to form the command or imperative sentence. And how do they know it was deleted? Because the reflexive pronouns in the predicate are identical with the subject, as in *You help yourself*. If you can omit the *you* in *You help yourself* to get *Help yourself*, you can omit the *you* in *You come here* to get *Come here*. Thus they have accounted for or explained the native speaker's linguistic intuition when he claims that *you* is understood in imperative sentences. They have also discovered and begun to specify transformational rules by which sentences undergo change. Soon they will see how we rearrange, delete, combine as we go from the deep structure, the source of meaning of the sentence, to the surface structure, the source of pronunciation of the sentence. They have already learned that we do not always say what we mean.

Pupils also like to try to figure out when we may and when we may not omit *that* in English sentences:

The girl {whom / who / that} I saw is my neighbor.

The girl I saw is my neighbor.

The girl {who / that} is playing ball is my neighbor.

The girl playing ball is my neighbor.

The girl {who / that} was playing ball is my neighbor.
*The girl playing ball is my neighbor.

The girl {whom / who / that} I work with is my neighbor.
The girl I work with is my neighbor.

The girl with {whom / who / *that} I work is my neighbor.
*The girl with I work is my neighbor.

Confronted with such examples, the student creates his own sentences to test and support his explanation of when we may and may not omit the relative pronoun, *that*. The student may use his own terminology; he senses thereby the need for precise, unambiguous terms or notation. The system of notation is less significant than the concepts he is dealing with. And students like to tackle a few sentences that still confound the theoreticians.

The nature of *rule* in grammar emerges for the student. For he sees that here *may* is not a matter of linguistic etiquette but of communication. If our language is a system, then the system works only when the rules are followed, without any reliance on our impulses, intuitions, or imagination. For it's these intuitions, our intuitive knowledge, that the rules specify. The student also realizes that we native speakers of English don't ordinarily think of these rules of grammar; we just apply them automatically until communication breaks down. Then we check to discover what rule has been violated, why we don't understand what we have heard or read, like *Help myself* or *The girl with that I work is my neighbor*. Just as we rarely think of why we fall—until we do; or how *color blindness* occurs—until we're confronted with it. We ordinarily leave such questions and their explanations to the scientist. But lucky the student who learns about his discipline through *doing* it, rather than just reading about it: who learns what painting is about by painting; what philosophy is about by philosophizing; what linguistics is about by doing what the linguist

126

does. Then the student approaches what the painter, the philosopher, the linguist has to say in a spirit of understanding, cameraderie, and respect. It seems to me that if students were encouraged more to wonder and hypothesize about their language *before* they were let loose on a language text, they would be more active *users* and even critics of their text. I am assuming, of course, that the teacher himself is informed, curious, and enthusiastic about language. But isn't that what electives can offer to some of us?

When youngsters play with language, then, what they do is their doing. They do not ask, "Can I say this?" Sure, you can say anything. But is it a sentence of English? Well, there are sentences and there are sentences. Youngsters begin to experiment with their own sentences in the most daring, uninhibited, imaginative, and revealing ways. They turn the sentence into different kinds of questions, into negatives, into different kinds of statement. And eventually, they will be testing, pushing, as they do in any good science class. This is the kind of active learning that is going on in some English classes that are availing themselves of what contemporary linguistics has to offer.

Moreover, what the linguist has been saying in a rather lonely and isolated way for at least sixteen years, what some classroom teachers trained in linguistics have been using in an even more lonely and isolated way for the past ten years—I mark time here by the appearance of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in 1956 and by some of the language institutes offered to teachers by the CEEB Commission on English and the NDEA—what the linguist has been saying and the teacher has been using are taking effect. Some of the important concepts of contemporary language study are filtering down, through texts, into English classrooms. They come at a crucial time. Although English teachers may have been able to politely ignore new studies in language, other disciplines have found that they can no longer afford to ignore what the generative grammarians have revealed about the nature of language and how the child acquires his native language or languages.

Psychologists have been led to reexamine their theories about how we humans learn language, or, for that matter, how we learn anything. A new discipline, responsive to the theories of modern

grammar, has come into being: psycholinguistics. The psycholinguist, says Dan I. Slobin, "combines the theoretical and empirical tools of both psychology and linguistics to study the mental processes underlying the acquisition and use of language." He is intrigued by a descriptive grammar "because it promises to tell us something important about the human mind."[5] As a result of this new endeavor, some of the transformational generative grammarians' startling assumptions of a few years ago are now acceptable doctrine. No one questions the existence of deep and surface structure anymore, though there are heated and brilliant arguments going on about degrees and kinds of deep structure. Gone is the simplistic behaviorist theory that the child learns language by mimicking, repeating, analogizing what he hears and by positive and negative reinforcement of responses to stimuli in his linguistic environment. Instead, psycholinguists have validated the notion that the infant is a very active learner; that instead of being conditioned to the sentences he hears, he creates his own. He is not simply latching on to the grammar we adults use. And there is very little trial and error involved in his acquisition of the rules for putting together a sentence. The very young child has a grammar very different from ours, with rules of its own. But it is a primitive grammar that seems to be universal, whether the baby is speaking English, German, Russian, Finnish, Luo, Samoan, or you name it. David McNeill illustrates this first grammar, consisting of two-word sentences in Figure 1 (Page 126).

The very young child has two classes of words, one of them closed, the other open. From day to day he keeps adding to the open class. His sentences consist of pivot words, which rarely occur alone but do occur in combination with words from the open class.

Big milk. Allgone boy. Byebye hot. (from Braine's subjects)
The Adam. That tinkertoy. A Mommy. (from Brown's subjects)
This doed. A other. Here dolly's. (from Ervin's subjects)

Although these two classes bear no resemblance to the parts of speech as we know them in adult sentences, they do enable the baby to talk in sentences that the hearer can understand, especially from context. All of us play the baby's language game. Sometimes we fill in the missing parts of these telegraphic sentences by saying them aloud and checking with the child. But there is no doubt that here the child is using novel utterances and non-adult

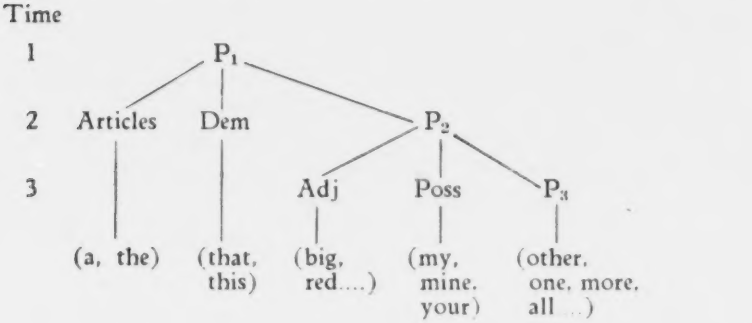
FIGURE 1 Pivot and Open Classes from Three Studies of Child Language[6]

Braine		*Brown*		*Ervin*	
allgone	boy	my	Adam	this	arm
byebye	sock	that	Becky	that	baby
big	boat	two	boot		dolly's
more	fan	a	coat		pretty
pretty	milk	the	coffee		yellow
my	plane	big	knee		come
see	shoe	green	man		doed
night-night	vitamins	poor	Mommy		———
hi	hot	wet	nut		———
	Mommy	dirty	sock		———
	Daddy	fresh	stool	the	other
	———	pretty	tinker-toy	a	baby
	———		———		dolly's
	———		———		pretty
			———		yellow
					———
				here	arm
				there	baby
					dolly's
					pretty
					yellow
					———
					———
					———

combinations that are not feeble imitations of adult sentences, nor are his sentences randomly assembled. Notice the rules for co-occurence in Ervin's list. *A other* and *The other* are sentences, but not *This other*, or *That other*. Evidently the child is predisposed to discover the grammatical categories. He honors distinctions before they develop.

The next step in his development is the subdivision of these categories. Roger Brown and Ursula Bellugi have followed the

child's differentiation of the pivot class within five months' time.[7] The child's sentences then look like this:



$$(P_1) + N \quad (1)$$

$$(Dem) + (Art) + (P_2) + N \quad (2)$$

$$(Art) + (Adj) + N \quad (3)$$

$$\left\{\begin{matrix} P_3 \\ Poss \\ Dem \end{matrix}\right\} + N \quad (4)$$

$$(Art) + N + (Adj) \quad (5)$$

FIGURE 2. Differentiation of the pivot class. Abbreviations are as follows: N = noun, that is, one of the open classes for this child; Art = articles; Dem = demonstrative pronouns; Adj = adjectives; Poss = possessive pronouns; P_1, P_2, and P_3 = pivot class at Times 1, 2, and 3, respectively. On the left is the actual history of the pivot class after the child was first observed. On the right are the rules of sentence formation with which the grammarian was compelled to credit the child in order to account for his sentences.[8]

Bellugi and Klima have carefully studied and described the child's development of negative and interrogative sentences in their successive stages.

Until recently, it had been taken for granted that by the age of five or six, the child had mastered his native grammar; that from there on, it was a matter of maturation in other ways that

was reflected in his more sophisticated sentences. Carol Chomsky, in studying the linguistic competence of children from five to ten, has shown that the child still has not mastered certain structures. She has shown that his difficulties in communication are not necessarily due to limits to his vocabulary. *Ask* and *tell*, for example, are everyday words in the five to ten year old's vocabulary. She had chosen, from the theoreticians' studies of complexity in grammar,

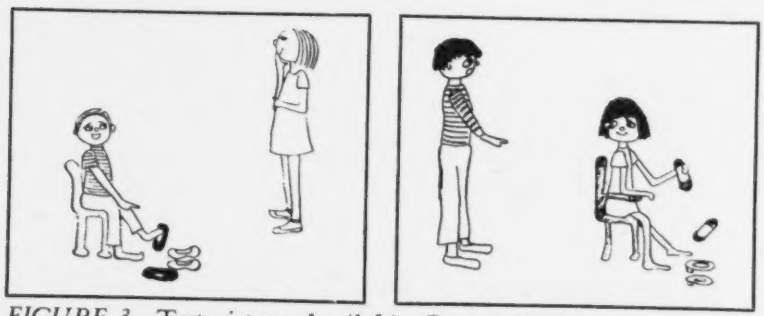
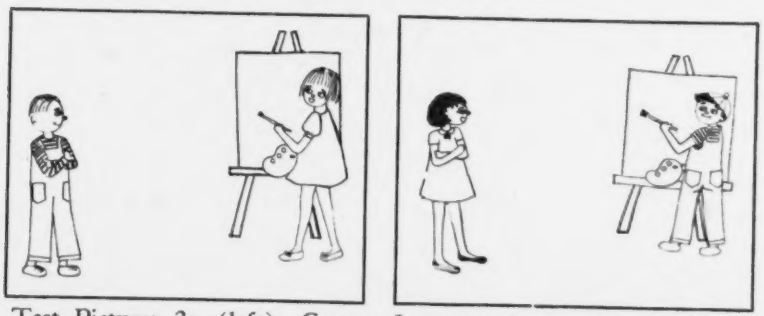
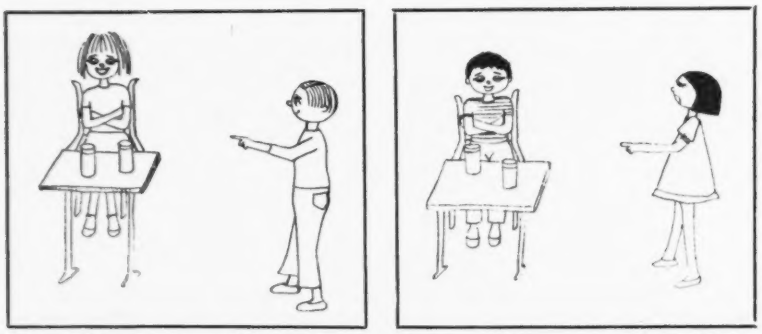


FIGURE 3. Test pictures 1a (left), Correct Interpretation, and 1b (right), Incorrect Interpretation. Test sentence: The boy asks the girl what shoes to wear. Subject is shown both pictures simultaneously and asked: 1. Which picture shows the boy asking the girl what shoes to wear? 2. (after selection) What is he saying to her?



Test Pictures 2a (left), Correct Interpretation, and 2b (right), Incorrect Interpretation. Test sentence: The girl asks the boy what to paint. Subject is shown both pictures simultaneously and asked: 1. Which picture shows the girl asking the boy what to paint? 2. (after selection) What is she saying to him?



Test Pictures 3a (left), Correct Interpretation, and 3b (right), Incorrect Interpretation. Test sentence: The girl asks the boy which juice to drink. Subject is shown both pictures simultaneously and asked: 1. Which picture shows the girl asking the boy which juice to drink? 2. (after selection) What is she saying to him?[9]

structures which might be acquired later than we assumed. Her test pictures (Figure 3) with sentences like *The boy asks the girl what shoes to wear, The girl asks the boy what to paint,* and *The girl asks the boy which juice to drink* elicited responses that validate the theoreticians' findings. Some of the children tested had not completely internalized some of the structures we assume they can interpret and understand. Thus, her study has not only caused us to reconsider child language; it has also deepened our notions of complexity. The kind of complexity involved in the sentences she chose is far more subtle and therefore elusive than the kind of complexity children thrive on in endless sentences like the story of the house that Jack built. We know now that words like *promise, tell, want, allow, advise, expect, order, persuade* may be clear to the child; yet not in certain syntactic environments. Chomsky has made us think deeply of what it means to have learned a word in one's language. And we had better take a new look at some of the criteria we had assumed in determining the appropriateness of language in texts that we use with our children.

Recent studies in the sound system of our language should also enable us to take a more realistic and critical look at how we teach the child to read and to spell. The child is deeply aware

of the relationship between what he hears or anticipates and what he has to read out or write out. Just as he does not derive meaning of a sentence from a knowledge of the meanings of the words alone, he does not hear isolated phonemes when he is listening. The language user does hear a stream of sound when a sentence is uttered. But he immediately generates new sentences based on the recognizable *units*: syllables, words, elements. He matches the sentence with what he *thinks* he heard. He accepts or rejects the sentence as a sentence of the language by means of his implicit generative knowledge; that is, he imposes a grammatical interpretation on the utterance. He then interprets the accepted sentence; that is, he imposes a semantic interpretation or meaning on the utterance. His understanding of the utterance comes from *any* knowledge or experience outside the grammar. And finally he believes or disbelieves the utterance. Again, notice that all this happens so instantaneously that we are unaware of these steps—unless communication breaks down. This is when we can hardly "believe our ears," when we ask the speaker to repeat. All this the young child does, too, as he starts playing the language game with us. A broad phonetic or phonemic representation, then, is very useful to the actor or opera singer who needs to pronounce clearly the sentences in a language he does not know. But such analysis of physical sounds may be a hindrance to a native speaker of the language. Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle have found that the essentially conventional spelling reflects more accurately the syntactic knowledge we bring to the sentences of our language in order to understand and pronounce those sentences. Spelling, in other words, corresponds to a deeper, more abstract level of representation of pronunciation rules than phonemic representation, which deals with physical sound alone.

When we stress phonemic-graphemic correspondences in reading, are we bypassing the child's internalized knowledge of the pronunciation rules and the grammatical rules of English? The phoneme is a unit of speech—not of language; it can only deal with surface detail. On the other hand, the whole-word approach based on reading and understanding may be equally confusing to the child, since the notion of *understanding*, on which it is based, again ignores the child's readiness to derive meaning from the deep

structure, rather than the surface structure of the sentence he is looking at.

For example, learning to spell or read aloud words like *metal, rebel, civil, Mongol, cherub* would involve the pupil in learning five separate phonemic-graphemic correspondences. If taught with their longer derived forms, their morphological identity emerges: *metal-metallic, rebel-rebellious, civil-civilian, Mongol-Mongolian, cherub-cherubic.* These words are more "sophisticated" than the *tell, ask* group. But the implications are clear: the best readiness for reading is a wide, broad experience in *using* language in many different contexts.

Those of us who are teaching reading and spelling should therefore seek these new, more psychologically and linguistically sound ways to bring literacy to the vast numbers of our pupils who are vaguely and often futilely groping toward it. We now know so much more about the child and how he learns his language that housecleaning is in order. One of the most encouraging signs is the number of gifted, dedicated teachers who are now moving into the early grades so that they may put into practice some of this psychological and linguistic theory. Psychologists becoming psycholinguists, high school history teachers going into the first and second grades not to escape from the frustrations of teaching adolescents, for the teachers I know who are making this move are some of the most effective in the high school classroom. And not to escape from the frustration of being graduated to administrative positions, for they have enjoyed that reward and success, too. But just to be where the real and exciting learning and the strong, theoretically-based teaching are taking place. This population shift may mean that we are beginning to build education on a solid foundation. But the new grade school breed is not seeking the child with mere messianic joy or hope. It is keeping up with the frontiers of knowledge that will enable the teacher to proceed out of knowledge and conviction.

The new textbooks are coming, too. Inevitably, textbooks represent an enormous lag between theory and practice. They are made to SELL, to meet the current demand, which can hardly emerge from theory alone. So we find extremely attractive new books, beautifully edited from the point of view of photography and art, but containing some sadly discredited language content.

We're looking, then, at a new way of looking at our pupils, at their language, at what they say, at what they really mean. We know that the surface structure of a sentence, which is what most of the old classroom grammars dealt with, can hardly fortify our intuitions about sentence meaning. We can address ourselves now, however, to meaning in a more satisfying way. Recent study of language universals, of deep and surface structure, has enabled semanticists to leave behind simplistic problems of word reference and to return to serious traditional attempts to describe or specify meaning. We know that word meanings can't be studied in isolation; they must be seen as syntactically related in sentences. What does *confess* mean, according to the lexicon? Why, then, does it make sense to say *I confess that I committed the crime*, but not *I confess that I committed suicide*, or *I confess that I have done nothing*, or *I confess that you committed the crime?*[10] Present studies of deep and surface structure have only got the semanticists started. Their sharp distinctions between lexical or referential meaning and grammatical or relational meaning have been based on the premise that meaning is determined by semantic projection rules operating on the deep structure of a sentence. They are debating deep structure levels of subjects and predicates. They are concerned with notions of agency, causality, instrumentality (with elements from which we derive verbals, nouns, prepositions); with another component from which we derive tense, interrogatives, negatives, and commands. The semanticists, too, see verbal behavior in universal terms. If every baby is born with a natural predisposition to acquiring rules for forming sentences in his language, then there must be a biological foundation for language universals. All languages have deep and surface structure. All languages have components from which we derive negation, conjunction, agent-action, attribution, location, identification, possession, etc. The work of the new semanticists, building upon the insights of generative grammar and linguistic universals, may be able to offer a theory which explains—that is, which specifies without leaving anything to our intuition or imagination—exactly how human beings derive meaning from the sentences they use.

Psycholinguists and semanticists are thus using the grammarian's theories to explain or describe in rigorous, logical fashion

some of the linguistic realities that we have been living with, in innocent, unspecified fashion. They now ask, as we might too, "Why must there be such an indirect relation between the meanings of a sentence and its phonetic form?" Why, in other words, don't we say what we mean? When we talk, the words come out sequentially: *Johnny is neither eager nor easy to please.* (Who pleases whom?) The concepts that comprise the meanings of this utterance are not organized sequentially. Instead, they consist of a fabric of complexly interwoven functions. Only by translating by transformational rules into the sequential form of surface structure do we manage to talk and understand.

Right now the spotlight is on the child and his language. The child is leading us, it would seem, to new content and new method for our English classrooms. In some schools, language study will be a return to deep, traditional concerns; but a return fortified by present studies in linguistic theory, language universals, formal systems, and psycholinguistics. In others, the new knowledge may emerge in new language units or courses subject to constant scrutiny by knowledgeable teachers who, like the students, have elected areas of English to be their specialty.

Where does all this linguistic ferment lead us? Dwight Bolinger, a linguist himself, has pointed out that "language teaching is no more linguistics than medicine is chemistry. Yet language teaching needs linguistics as medicine needs chemistry." Maybe we English teachers should let well enough alone and leave linguistics to the linguists, or, if the subject must infiltrate our schools, maybe it ought to be left to the scientists or the social scientists. Are we not weathering enough storm and stress in our own bailiwick without looking for more complications? Haven't we, whose teaching memory goes back to the fifties and sixties, had enough of linguistic gimmickry and gadgetry, enough busy work, mathematical hieroglyphics, learning and unlearning, thanks to misguided institutes and hastily assembled texts? If language must be taught, let's teach it together with anthropology, or psychology, or philosophy, or sociology. But please, leave English alone. The cop-out is tempting.

The only trouble is that a few of us still feel that the study of the English language is beautiful and important, as germane to

our subject as The Art of the Film, or Trials in Literature, or Propaganda Techniques, or Theater Arts. Let us make the most, then, out of this trend to electives. Let us each find our interest and strength. But whatever we choose to teach, let's teach it with passion and knowledge. "A live person who is turned on by his own subject is continually learning and discovering and, provided he is willing to take the time, imparts his excitement and pleasure to his students.[11] These words for our time were not elicited by Skinner's *Walden II*. They are transformed from Thoreau's pure sky water.

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11. My brother, Sidney A. Bludman.

THE 1972 NCTE DISTINGUISHED LECTURES PROGRAM

The following is a list of the places where the seven 1972 Distinguished Lecturers spoke and the dates of their appearances.

JOHN ASHMEAD Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College, Lorman, Mississippi, February 9; Berry College, Mount Berry, Georgia, April 6; Saint Francis College, Biddeford, Maine, March 7.

JAMES N. BRITTON Hastings College, Hastings, Nebraska, April 20; Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana, April 18; Troy State University, Troy, Alabama, April 18; University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, April 25; Villa Maria College, Erie, Pennsylvania, April 11.

JOHN H. FISHER Bemidji State College, Bemidji, Minnesota, fall, 1972; Upper Iowa College, Fayette, Iowa, January 28; Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, February 15.

GEORGE E. KENT Benedict College, Columbia, South Carolina, February 17; Brescia College, Owensboro, Kentucky, March 2; Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, May 8; Mary Holmes College, West Point, Massachusetts, April 6; Savannah State College, Savannah, Georgia, March 23.

WALTER LOBAN Kauai District Department of Education, Lihue, Hawaii, April 8; Nogales High School, Nogales, Arizona, March 28; Texas Agricultural and Technical University, Kingsville, Texas, February 24; University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, fall 1972.

MIRIAM GOLDSTEIN SARGON Iowa Wesleyan College, Mount Pleasant, Iowa, October 19; Thomasville City Schools, Thomasville, Georgia, April 17; Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, fall 1972.

OWEN THOMAS Lima Campus, Ohio State University, Lima, Ohio, fall 1972; Southeastern Oklahoma State College, Durant, Oklahoma, April 25, 26; University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, fall 1972.

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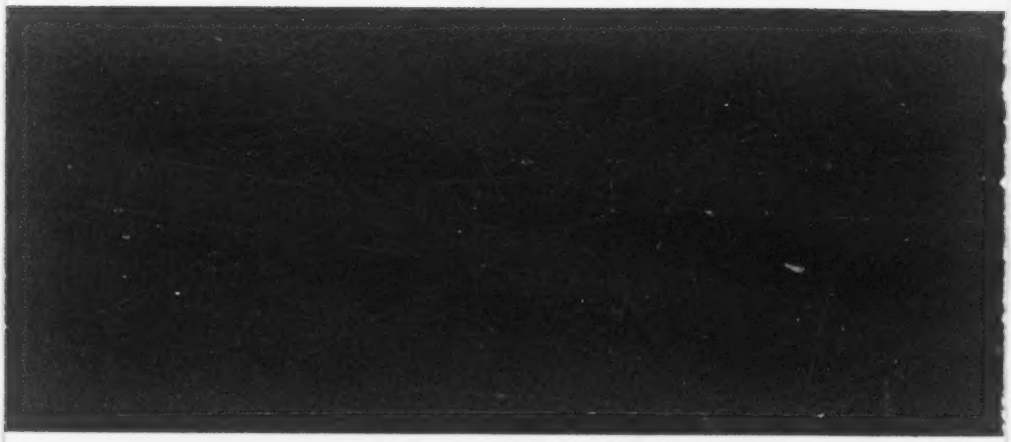

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